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MODERN ART OF PAKISTAN: LAHORE ART CIRCLE 1947-1957

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Art Historical Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

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Dedicated to my father, Muhammad Iqbal

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I must admit that I have barely scratched the surface of an undiscovered plethora of artworks, which so far has lived in the anonymity of the public eye. My dissertation is just the beginning of much-needed discourse on the development of modern art in Pakistan in its formative years and hopes this will generate a productive dialogue and interest in Pakistani art historical field. I take complete responsibility to all the shortcomings and flaws of this dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

MODERN ART OF PAKISTAN: LAHORE ART CIRCLE 1947-1957

By Samina Iqbal, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2016

Major Director: Dr. Dina Bangdel, Associate Professor, Department of Art History and Director, Art History Program at VCU in Qatar

This dissertation focuses on the modern art of Pakistan from 1947-57, more specifically, the role of six important artists who founded the Lahore Art Circle (LAC) in 1952. The group played a pivotal role in the formulation of modernism in Pakistan after its establishment as an Islamic Republic. Framed within postcolonial theories and criticism, this study will address the role of modern art in developing new artistic

sensibilities in the nation of Pakistan. In order to understand the context of LAC's framing of "modernism" and "nationalism" in terms of specific historic and hybrid nexus, my research will provide an investigation of works of only the founding members of the Lahore Art Circle including: Shakir Ali (1924-1975), Sheikh Safdar Ali (1924-1983), Moyene Najmi (1926-1997), Ali Imam (1924-2000), Ahmed Parvez (1926-1979) and Anwar Jalal Shemza (1928-1985). In analyzing the works of individual artists and the role of LAC during the first decade of the establishment of Pakistan as a nation-state, this study provides a framework to understand the specific condition of modernism in Pakistan that was dictated by these artists' careers and works. Thus, this research investigates how the framing of modernism for these artists took on highly personal, international, incipiently national and distinctly local forms in the early years of the Pakistan after the Partition of 1947. Lastly, it will also examine how the individual LAC artists situated themselves in the discourse between constructing a newly established Pakistani identity within the larger paradigms of international modernism.

Introduction

In 2009, eight years after 9/11, in an effort to bring the positive side of Pakistan to the forefront of American attention, the Asia Society of New York held its first landmark exhibition, *Hanging Fire*, to focus on this nation's contemporary art. The exhibition showcased fifty works by fifteen Pakistani artists, representing a range of expressions focusing on current local, social, political and international issues in versatile media including; installation, video, photography, painting, and sculpture. The exhibition was well received in New York and showed the creative, vibrant, and intellectual side of Pakistan, to which the West was completely oblivious prior to this exhibition. Melissa Chiu, the Museum Director of Asia Society, in the opening essay of the accompanying catalog argued, "[T]he curatorial approach to *Hanging Fire*, exhibition is to introduce the works of artists for whom the socio-political context in which they live and work is important to an understanding of their art, which is clearly attuned to international concerns as much as local one."¹

While in agreement with Chiu's statement about current work, it is important to note that Pakistani artists have not just recently started to respond to and reflect on the socio-political environment locally and globally; this has always been a vital part of art practices in Pakistan since its independence in 1947. Although *Hanging Fire* was an

¹ Melissa Chiu, *Hanging Fire* (New Havens & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 9.

important, groundbreaking exhibition that formally introduced the contributions of the Pakistani artists to the global contemporary art, no works by Pakistani modernist artists were included in this first major exhibition of this nation's art in the West. The first generation of modern artists in Pakistan played a pivotal role in laying a platform for artists fifty years later to thrive internationally. Therefore, understanding the contributions of modernist artists of Pakistan in the country's formative years must be carefully considered in order to contextualize contemporary developments of Pakistani art.

Within this current focus on Pakistani art in the global art arena, which is helping to rectify the overlooked area of this country's modern art, there is definitely a lacuna in the history of Pakistani art developed during the early years of the country's formation. In order to appreciate contemporary trends in Pakistani art, one must study the art produced during the formative years of its establishment. Pakistani modern artists during the nation's formative years have not been able to make their presence known on the international art scene with the same impact as their counterparts in India. Indian modernist artists like Maqbool Fida Husain (1915-2011), Tyeb Mehta (1925-2009), Syed Haider Raza (b.1922), and Frances Newton Souza (1924-2002) hold outstanding positions in global modern art, and they are highly priced artists. The reason for their success is a number of exhibitions that have been held in the US in the last decade, which have highlighted and contributed to the promotion of the modernist work in the international art world. The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, for instance, has curated three exhibitions entitled, *Modernist Art from India*, from 2011-2013. The Philadelphia

Museum of Art has held *Rhythms of India: The Art of Nandalal Bose* in 2008, and the Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts, held *Painting the Modern in India* in 2012.

These are just a few examples of the continuous promotion of the modern art of India. On the contrary, Pakistani modern art has almost never been shown in the United States, and the closest to a comprehensive show of Pakistani art was *Hanging Fire*.

I must admit that as a diaspora practicing artist, I only realized this gap upon taking a graduate seminar on *Modern and Contemporary Art of South Asia* in 2012. Much of the course material covered the contemporary art of Pakistan (maybe because of all the attention on the international media), but none about the modern art of Pakistan. As I studied about the Bombay Progressives Group (also known as Progressive Artist Group, formed by six Indian artists in 1947), I was curious to know if similar artistic trends had developed in Pakistan at that time. I was particularly struck by the fact that only a few books on the history of Pakistani art reference the name of the Lahore Art Circle, which was founded by five artists in 1952, and there have been no thorough studies of the artists in this group or of their work. Realizing this gap in the history of modern art of Pakistan, I undertook the task of uncovering the mystery of the Lahore Art Circle.

Thesis:

This dissertation focuses on the modern art of Pakistan from 1947 to 1957. As it analyzes the various trends of art making in Pakistan during the first decade of its independence, this investigation specifically highlight the works and roles of the six

important artists who founded the Lahore Art Circle hereafter (LAC) in 1952. The group played a pivotal role in the formulation of modernism in Pakistan after its establishment as the Islamic Republic. Since 1947 Pakistan was no longer a colony, this study employs the framework of postcolonial theories and criticism to address the role of modern art in developing new artistic sensibilities in the new nation of Pakistan.

In order to understand the context of LAC's framing of "modernism" in terms of a specific, historic and hybrid nexus, the scope of the investigation will be limited to the works of the founding members of Lahore Art Circle including: Shakir Ali (1914-1975), Sheikh Safdar Ali (1924-1983), Syed Ali Imam (1924-2000), Moyene Najmi (1926-1997), Ahmed Parvez (1926-1979), and Anwar Jalal Shemza (1928-1985).² In analyzing the works of individual artists and the active role of the LAC in promoting modern art in Pakistan during the first decade of the establishment as a nation-state, the study provides a framework to understand the specific condition of modernism in Pakistan that was determined by these artists' careers and works. Thus, this research investigates how the framing of modernism for these artists took on highly personal, international, incipiently national, and distinctly local forms in the early years of Pakistan after the Partition of 1947. Lastly, it will also examine how individual LAC artists situated themselves in the

² In Pakistan, individuals are called either by their first names (if there is no middle name). In a case of first, middle, and last name, the first refers to the caste of the family for example; Syed and Sheikh and the middle name is used to address. Last names are rarely used to address an individual because they are the first name of the father and only indicate the relationship. For example, Sheikh Safdar Ali is called Safdar Ali and Syed Ali Imam is Ali Imam, Shakir Ali is Shakir. This dissertation will address the artists by their first or full name since more than one artist shares the first, middle or last name. In some cases, individuals are known by their last names, for example Anwar Jalal Shemza, where Shemza is his pen name. To avoid the confusion I will address them with full names.

discourse by constructing a newly established Pakistani identity within the larger paradigms of international modernism.

Modernism in the context of Pakistan cannot be considered simply as a single movement that operated parallel to or in conformity with western modernist trends. Instead, the first generation of Pakistani modern artists utilized a range of traditional stylistic elements, with antecedents in such western art movements as Abstraction, Cubism, Post-Impressionism and *De Stijl*, incorporated into their practices to establish their own modern idiom. This dissertation will analyze how LAC constituted an integral part of a larger collective of Pakistani intelligentsia centered in Lahore, without blindly following the unspoken state agenda that sought to shed the country's shared history with India, and, just as importantly, without undermining the formulation of the Pakistani identity. Through their works, they established a distinct continuum of modern sensibilities in Lahore, one of the major centers of arts and literature in the emerging nation.

It is important to note that the LAC artists did not introduce modern art to Pakistan. Colonial India already had experienced a series of multiple modern art movements introduced in the artistic arena time and again with the rise and fall of political movements. Modernism in colonial Indian art first took the form of intellectual ideas that developed with colonialism and later were used as a tool of resistance against colonialism (It will be discussed in detail in chapter 1).³ However, in the postcolonial era

³ Even in the West, defining modernism is a discourse that continues to expand. But this study is not using the term "modern art" in its Western definition, as a break from the past with its widespread

after the division of the Indian subcontinent into two separate countries (India and Pakistan), LAC artists' contributions were to provide a distinct stamp of modernism as the first generation of Pakistani modern artists, who became the precursors of the contemporary art of Pakistan in the global art world as discussed above. While breaking away from traditional South Asian art practices and borrowing a generalized vocabulary from various modern western art movements, LAC artists continuously experimented and evolved their work by exploring a number of different genres and styles. With their exploratory approach, broad enough to encompass a range of idioms that were both modern and germane to Pakistan, LAC's adherents invented a modernism that can be considered *heuristic* - one that is continuously evolving with experimentation and trial-and-error methods. The broader objective of this study, therefore, will be to analyze and view "modernism" according to LAC's objectives and conceptions by providing a close reading of these artists' works that reflected a series of ongoing, purposefully unresolved, dialectical tensions predicated on international, national, and local stylistics concerns.

Setting up the Stage

The Indian subcontinent has always been a multicultural society. It is located at a juncture of several regions and, due to its geographical position, it has a long history of invasion and colonization from different civilizations. The most influential invaders were the Mughals from Central Asia, who ruled over India for more than 200 years.⁴ However, the British Empire was the only one to establish a unified Raj throughout India (which

fascination with technology and the industrial revolution. Rather, it is employed as a social revolution, which is amplified by intellectual thinking of modernity.

⁴ For details of history of India's invasion see Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism: The New Critical Idioms* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 4.

constitutes today's India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) while maintaining a motherland in England.

In 1757, the East India Company gained control of the Bengal province after defeating the reigning Mughal Viceroy of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daulah, in the battle of Plassey.⁵ Following this small success, the province that began as a modest business venture grew and was transformed into a world empire in less than a century. At the time when Britain established its Raj, the idea of pure ethnicity in India was non-existent. Unprecedented material prosperity, emanating from the industrial revolution, scientific achievements, and the ideology of progress all contributed to a sense of cultural superiority that became the hallmark of the British Empire.⁶ In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Indian intelligentsia developed a resistance against the British Raj through the language of nationhood. The period is characterized by the dialectic between colonialism and nationalism, and the construction of cultural difference in a time of rapid globalization of culture.⁷

The early resistance against British Empire gave rise to nationalism in colonial India. In 1857, the first revolt against the British Empire occurred, exactly one hundred

⁵ Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 5.

⁶ Loomba raises several questions about what was so inherently powerful about Englishmen who were able to establish such an organized, unified empire far away from their motherland. One of the explanations that are offered is the fact that the earlier colonialisms were pre-capitalist while modern colonialism was established alongside capitalism in Western Europe. Modern colonialism did more than exact tribute, goods and wealth from the countries participating in this ideology conquered. It restructured the economies of the latter so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between the colonized and colonial countries. In whichever direction human beings and raw materials travelled, the profits always flowed back into the so-called "mother country."

⁷ Partha Mitter, *Indian Art* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 171.

years after colonization began, and it was called the Sepoy Mutiny.⁸ Bengal was the first Indian state to possess the necessary vitality to explore and create new achievements in many fields. Among the factors contributing to this ambience was the growth of a lively new middle class in the bustling city of Calcutta, which was the capital town of Bengal. This new class largely constituted the higher caste of Hindu families who opted for fashionable western learning and was suddenly confronted with vast fields of original thought. An emphasis on a liberal education system resulted in the establishment of several new colleges, which produced a number of civic-minded leaders who were instrumental in developing political and social consciousness as well as nationalism. All through the 19th century a gradual increase in political consciousness united the newly educated classes and engaged them in developing Indian nationalism and defying the British Raj.

As Bengal became the center for Indian nationalism, the British were threatened by its strength. In order to weaken its nationalist movement, Lord Curzon (1899–1905), the Viceroy of India, proposed the partition of Bengal and introduced the division based on religions to create challenges for the Indian National Congress, which was slowly becoming the main opponent of British rule. Indian nationalists saw the strategy behind the partition and condemned it unanimously, starting the anti-partition and the *swadeshi* movement. This movement promoted the use of Indian goods and boycotted British ones,

⁸ The Sepoy Mutiny was a result of various grievances and a flashpoint was reached when soldiers were asked to bite off paper cartridges for their rifles, which they believed were greased with animal fat, specifically beef, and pork. This was, and is, against the religious beliefs of Hindus and Muslims.

severely damaging the British economy.⁹ Later it was successful in liberating India from the British Raj. However, the Indian Nationalist movement's inclination toward *Hindu* nationalism was made obvious through the use of visual language depicting goddess imagery and slogans for *Bharat Mata (mother India)*, which provoked religious nationalist sentiments among the Indian nation.¹⁰ Within this socio-political milieu, the Bengal nationalist art movement began, with the iconic flag of *Mother India*, serving as the nation's symbol.

The rise of Hindu nationalism created feelings of unease among the Muslims, the largest minority in India at that time. Realizing that Muslims might not be given due representation after the end of the British Raj, the *All-India Muslim League*, (earlier formed in 1906 as a partner to the Indian National Congress) took up a separatist movement for Pakistan and contended that the Muslims of India were not simply a religious minority, they were a separate and distinct nation based on Islamic faith and culture. Therefore, it argued that the Muslim nation was entitled to separate statehood. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, was the foremost speaker for this movement.¹¹ Although the basis of the division for the country is debatable, for this

⁹ Partha Mitter, *Art and Colonialism in Colonial India 1850-1922* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 302-304.

¹⁰ 'Hindu Nationalism' became dominant because of the sheer fact that Hindus were in the majority. Abanindranath Tagore's *Bharat Mata* became the iconic image of the movement. There were no signs of Muslim participation in the movement and everything alluded to Hindu Nationalism. According to Partha Mitter, "The *swadeshi* ideology of art, a reflection of militant Hindu nationalism, tended to privilege Hindu culture as the kernel of the Indian nation, thereby disinherit other communities." Mitter, *Indian Art*, 180.

¹¹ Ishtiaq Ahmed, "Pakistan National Identity," *International review of Modern Sociology*, 34:1 (2008), 48. Ayesha Jalal argues that Jinnah used the idea of the separate nation to secure due representation of Muslims in Congress, and he did not actually want the partition of India. For more details see Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

study, the generally accepted idea that it was divided on the basis of religions, between Hindus and Muslims, has been used.¹²

The Partition of British India and the creation of a new nation of Pakistan was a watershed moment in the history of the Indian subcontinent. Not only did it end the British Raj in 1947, but it also divided the country into the two separate nations of India and Pakistan. The historical division included the ruling powers, government, private institutions, wealth, and people. It was the largest historical migration, involving the largest displacement and massacre at this time in world history, which profoundly affected people on both sides of the border. Statistics indicate about fifteen million people migrated from both sides of the borders, and about one to two million died.¹³ As India strived to establish itself as a secular country, Pakistan founded itself as an independent, Islamic Republic based on a two-nation theory. According to the Two Nation Theory: “The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literature. They neither intermarry nor inter-dine together and, indeed, they belong to two different civilizations, which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions.”¹⁴

¹² Ayesha Jalal has done extensive research and writing on the partition of Indian subcontinent, and she diverts from the widely accepted idea of Partition of 1947 based on religion. See her books, *The Sole Spokesman* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* (Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2014), *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹³ Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side Of Silence: Voices From The Partition Of India* (India: Penguin Books, 1998), 3.

¹⁴ Excerpt from the Presidential address of Muhammad Ali Jinnah in Lahore Session of Muslim League, March 23-24, 1940 (Islamabad: Directorate of Films and Publishing, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, 1983),5-23.

The first decade of Pakistani history (1947-57) was difficult and traumatic. Every aspect of life in the newly established society was in flux. The nation-state of Pakistan began to construct a highly selective history, which deliberately focused on shedding thousands of years of a shared past with India in order to formulate a national ideology that was Islamic.¹⁵ On March 7th, 1949, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan presented a resolution called the "Objectives Resolution" to the first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, which presented guidelines for the future constitution of the newly established country.¹⁶ An excerpt from the resolution states:

In the name of Allah, the Benificent [sic], the Merciful; Whereas sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to God Almighty alone and the authority which He has delegated to the State of Pakistan through its people for being exercised within the limit prescribed by Him is a sacred trust; This Constituent Assembly representing the people of Pakistan resolves to frame a constitution for the sovereign independent State of Pakistan: Wherein the State shall exercise its powers and authority through the chosen representatives of the people; Wherein the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice, as enunciated by Islam, shall be fully observed; ~~Muslims shall be~~ enabled to order their lives in the individual and collective spheres in accord with the teachings and of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and the Sunna. Wherein adequate provision shall be made for the minorities freely to profess and practice their religions and develop their cultures; Whereby the territories now included in or in accession with Pakistan and such other territories as may hereafter be included in or accede to Pakistan shall form a Federation wherein the units will be autonomous with such boundaries and limitations on their powers and authority as may be prescribed; ~~full hereon shall be guaranteed~~ equality of status, of opportunity and before law, social, economic and political

http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt_jinnah_lahore_1940.html (accessed on Dec 15,2015).

¹⁵ Nation-state of Pakistan comprises West and East Pakistan (current Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively).

¹⁶ Nasim Hasan Shah, "The Objective Resolution and its Impact on the Administration of Justice in Pakistan," *Islamic Studies*, 26: 4 (Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad: 1987), 383-4.

justice, and freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship and association, subject to law and public morality; ~~all provisions~~ shall be made to safeguard the legitimate interests of minorities and backward and depressed classes; Wherein the independence of the judiciary shall be fully secured; ~~in the territories of the Federation, its~~ independence and all its rights including its sovereign rights on land, sea and air shall be safeguarded; So that the people of Pakistan may their full contribution towards international peace and progress and happiness of humanity. ¹⁷

The resolution was adopted on March 12th, 1949, and it clearly indicates that the future constitution of Pakistan would be modeled according to the ideology of Islam: henceforth, all laws would conform to the Islamic injunctions. In addition, it would also use the model of western democracy. The resolution, in its entirety, was made part of the first Constitution of Pakistan in 1949, and later it became the preamble for all the future constitutions of Pakistan.¹⁸ Therefore, it is obvious from the excerpt above that the government of Pakistan favored the Islamic agenda. Due to the precarious and distressful economic, social and political situation in which nothing seemed to have a definitive shape and form, this chaotic history has remained understudied, especially in relation to art practices.

In any society, art and literature play an important role in shaping its culture. In the case of newly established Pakistan, the studies of Urdu literature have demonstrated

¹⁷ Resolution was passed in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on Saturday, March 12, 1949. The text of the Resolution is being reproduced here from: Government of Pakistan, The Constituent Assembly of Pakistan Debates: Official Report of the Fifth Session of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (Karachi: Government of Pakistan, 1949), V: 101-102. It was quoted in "The Objectives Resolution," in *Islamic Studies* 48:1 (International Islamic University, Islamabad: 2009), 89.

¹⁸ Nasim Hasan Shah, "The Objectives Resolution And Its Impact On The Administration Of Justice in Pakistan," *Islamic Studies* 26: 4 (International Islamic University, Islamabad: 1987), 384-385. For last sixty-nine years although a number of constitutions (1956, 1962, the Interim Constitution of 1972 and the Permanent Constitution of 1973) were enacted and constitutional amendments were made the "Objectives Resolution" was unflinchingly retained.

that prominent writers and poets like Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984), Intizar Husain (1923-2016), Abdullah Hussain (1931-2015), Hafeez Jalandhari (1900-1982), Sadaat Hassan Manto (1912-1955), Noon Meem Rashid (1910-1975), and many others were actively involved in debates surrounding the experiences of partition and nation building. They contributed significant scholarship to this discourse of partition.¹⁹ However, one does not find any significant works of arts that reflect or respond to the Partition. Earlier in British India, artists have always been active participants in responding and reflecting on the changing political and social conditions in colonial India. For example, the rise of Abanindranath Tagore's Bengal School and the visual image of *Bharat Mata* (figure 1.3), which will be discussed in detail in chapter 2, became part of a campaign against colonialism. Similarly Abdur Rahman Chughtai's switch from his Hindu narratives in his paintings such as *Arjun the Victor* (figure 1.8) to the nostalgic glorious past of the Muslims *Jahan Ara and Taj* (figure 1.9) was the result of his reaction to the Hindu nationalism that started early in the twentieth century. But there seems to be an absence of Pakistani artists reflecting on the discourse of Partition in the visual arts. This lack might be due to the absence of critical scholarship on the role that the visual arts played in the rhetoric of nation building, and in the movement of modernism as a new language unrelated to the formation of an Islamic nation. Other key factors may be taken into consideration: Lack of Pakistan's government support to the visual artists, or, artists' lack of access to exhibition venues and limited public access to the few exhibition venues that were available at that time, and the immediate plight of migrants/refugees (continued for

¹⁹ Manto's well-known short story "Kali Shalwar", famous poem of Faiz entitled, "*Subh e Azaadi*-August 1947" and many more examples of literary pieces on Partition.

three years), which was considered a much more pressing issue. All of the aforementioned factors may well have relegated the visual arts to a position of less importance or recognition.

Nonetheless, during the process of restructuring the nation-state, the fine arts of Pakistan started to develop in various new directions, which was a mix of different trends in art practices (mostly painting) with some following the traditional trajectory of Indian miniature painting, others, European academic art, and still other moving into completely different direction from the former two. Already established pre-partition Muslim senior artists, such as Abdur Rahman Chughtai in Lahore and Fyzee Rahamin, in Karachi, became the front-runners of the visual arts of Pakistani. Their work followed the nationalist rhetoric of an Islamic identity through its distinctive revival of Persian–Mughal stylistic conventions with overt Islamic references celebrating the glories of the pre-colonial past of the Mughal Empire, which will be discussed later in chapter 1.

In the meantime, Zubeida Agha (1922-1997) introduced abstract art through her first solo painting exhibition held in Karachi in 1949, which was a shock for the Pakistani public, as it was so different from any other paintings that they had seen. In the next five years of Pakistan's establishment there develops a modern art movement, which is indebted to the artist Shakir Ali after his return to Lahore from the Europe in 1952. Five other young LAC artists, eager to find a new direction in their work that was distinct from the traditional prevalent practices, were inspired by their intellectual and artistic engagements with Shakir Ali's new body of work, which became a catalyst that fostered the new modern art practices.

Literature Review

This section provides a review of scholarly literature on the topic of LAC while advancing research questions for investigating the ideological implications of how members of this group incorporated western influences. Other questions include: (1) Did LAC promote a secular, pluralistic and liberal society? (2) How did the leftist inclination of LAC coexist with the rhetoric of an Islamic republic of Pakistan? The following scholarly literature review for research will be divided into the three categories of (a) Modernism in the context of India, (b) Modernism in Pakistan, and (c) Theoretical framework of postcolonialism.

A. Scholarship on Indian Modernism:

For the purpose of this research, it is imperative to look at the art historical scholarship produced in South Asia, more specifically India, for a number of reasons, including the obvious fact that India and Pakistan both were part of the same country until 1947. The history of the Indian subcontinent (India and Pakistan) is complex; both countries have shared experiences of modernity, colonialism and partition. Pakistani art history, however, lacks a study of the modern art of Pakistan within the context of postcolonial India, as well as in comparison to western modernism, due to the fact that Pakistan's modern period began in 1947.²⁰ The timing is problematic because Pakistan

²⁰ The two significant art history survey books: *Art in Pakistan* by Jalaluddin Ahmed, published in 1954 and *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan*, by Akbar Naqvi, published in 1998. Both start their discussions of art from Abdur Rahman Chughtai. In fact, Jalaluddin Ahmed claims

was not created in a vacuum or over night, but has thousands of years of shared history with India. To examine and analyze the works produced from 1947 onwards, one needs to contextualize them in terms of their Indian history. A significant amount of scholarship has focused in India on the Progressive Artists Group hereafter (PAG), a group of modern artists founded in 1947, which this dissertation will consider as parallel to LAC in its modernist approach.²¹Therefore, scholarship produced on PAG can be used as a model for investigating LAC.

Yashodhara Dalmia's extensive work on PAG entitled, *The Making of Modern Indian Art*, is a robustly documented art historical survey consisting mostly of historical and biographical information on the members of PAG, and, it provides an understanding of the artistic milieu in colonial India. Dalmia traces the development of modernist artists' dialogue with the western art. The PAG members were in dialogue with western modernism and projected themselves as members of a secular India with a clearly written manifesto.

One of the most significant scholars of South Asian art, Geeta Kapur, in her important work, *When was Modernism in Indian Art?* addresses the notion of tradition, nationalism, and modernism in Indian art. Kapur theorizes that modernism formed a

the "Miniature painting and Greco-Roman Buddhist art as sources," but then jump to discussions of Chughtai and Fyzee Rahamin.

²¹ Since this study argues that modernism in the context of Indian subcontinent is not parallel to the western canon of modernism (discussed in detail in chapter 1), modernism, then, needs to be examined in "the peculiar contextual needs and expression of regional context," as suggested by Partha Mitter in his essay, "Interventions: Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery." Therefore, the use of the terms of *modernism* and *modernist* in this study will not refer to Clement Greenberg's definition of modernism, according to which "the essence of modernism lies in the use of characteristics method of a discipline itself not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence." Partha Mitter, Interventions: Decentering Modernism, Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery. *The Art Bulletin*, 90:4 (2008), 540.

double discourse with nationalism. She argues that the national and the modern were in constant dialogue. Nationalist art, for example, promoted the use of traditional or indigenous motifs. Modernism had constructed a paradoxical view of such motifs, sometimes rendering them as progressive signs and at other times subverting them as conservative and traditional. Her book serves as a model for this research on LAC because India and Pakistan had a shared history of the colonial past. In the case of Pakistan, however, pre-partition artists made a deliberate shift from their tradition of shared indigenous practices with Indian art by incorporating themes of their pre-colonial Muslim past to create a distinctly “Pakistani tradition.” Later, the first generation of Pakistani modern artists specifically LAC members, similar to the Indian artists comprising PAG, established their art practice based on the idea of “freedom of expression,” which deviated from the prevalent practices of academic realism and revival of Mughal- Persian style of painting.

In *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-garde 1922-1947*, Partha Mitter examines the Bauhaus exhibition of 1922 in Calcutta as the advent of Modernism in colonial India. He has traced the development of modernism in the fine art of India as a response to the social and political upheavals in colonial India. While examining the orientalism of the Bengal School of Art and highlighting the anti-nationalism of Rabindranath Tagore, Mitter places Indian modernism within the larger spectrum of global modernity. His discourse around the events between 1922-1947 lays a foundation for future art historical research, including this study, as it provides a fuller picture of the artistic milieu of colonial India that was Pakistan’s past as well.

In his article, “Interventions: Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery,” Partha Mitter gives an overview of how modern art in the context of non-western cultures is conceived in the West, which is unoriginal and derivative of western art. He questions crediting all modern works as stemming from a western canon and suggests a shift from the prevalent, homogenous discourse of modernism to a more heterogeneous definition that focuses on global modernism by including other regions in the world to produce a more inclusive art history. This essay is extremely useful for this dissertation because this is a crucial issue when considering Pakistani modernist artists. It will use Partha Mitter’s questioning to explore and analyze the works of LAC while also questioning the unfair exchange of inspiration from West to Non-Western cultures. Mitter criticizes the unfairness and irony of considering Picasso’s borrowing of African primitivism as modern, but regarding non-Western artists use of modern western artistic vocabularies unoriginal.

Rebecca Brown in her book, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*, provides a detailed study of the emergence of a self-conscious Indian modernism in visual art. She notes that while the Indian artists adapted the syntax of the western modern art movements, they deliberately grounded it in the context of India as a newly established nation. This notion is very close to this dissertation, investigation of Pakistani artists who were not making a deliberate effort to ground it in the context of Pakistan.

B. Scholarship on Pakistani Modernism:

There is a scarcity of scholarship on the modern art of Pakistan. There are a number of reasons why western scholars have not focused on the modern art of Pakistan produced in its formative years. Unlike PAG, which had a prominent presence on the national scene of India due to its pronounced secular manifesto, LAC members were quietly working and their visibility was not noticeable because they had no support from the government, and there were not many exhibition venues available to showcase their works. Congruently, western scholars have not considered the modern art of Pakistan to be of merit, and this attitude is supported by the scholarship produced in the early 1960s by British art critic such as G. M. Butcher. Reviewing Anwar Jalal Shemza's work in an article, Butcher argued that "Shemza's earlier work produced in Pakistan was derivative and it was not until the qualitative western painting acted upon him to produce his original expression."²² After Partition, Chughtai's work was identified under a nationalistic rubric, therefore, his work became the face of "national Islamic art of Pakistan," and since the works of LAC members did not fit the rhetoric of nationalism, they were not considered significant and consequently were not provided with any representation on the national level. Within Pakistan, the reviews of artwork shown in modern art exhibitions were limited to brief newspaper reviews and exhibition catalogues. Furthermore, the limited number of articles and essays were essentially descriptive rather than analytical.

²² W. G. Butcher, "Shemza: Years in London," *Contemporary Art in Pakistan: A Quarterly Magazine*, Vol. II no. 2 (Summer 1961), 10-13.

Military Gazette, a widely distributed daily newspaper, which was easily accessible to the public, included not only published information about the prevalent political and social conditions, but also articles on art exhibitions. Interestingly, the writers of these articles were aristocrats or civil servants from the elite class, with no training in art history or art criticism. However, their articles are important for this dissertation as they provide documentation of specific artistic events during the decade examined in this study. Few of the monographs published on individual artists are biographical and descriptive and are limited to only a few artists prominent in the art scene at that time. These include Shakir Ali, Zubeida Agha, Anna Molka Ahmed (1917-1995), Syed Sadequin Ahmed Naqvi (1923-1987), and Anwar Jalal Shemza.²³

The first art historical study, *Contemporary Painters of Pakistan*, was written by Jalaluddin Ahmed published in 1954. It is a survey of Pakistani art and covers artwork produced from 1947 to 1954. The book is divided into three generations of artists in chronological order: Elder Group, comprises of mostly established pre-partition artists; the Young Elders, (modern artists such as Zubeida Agha, Zain ul Abedin and Sheikh Ahmed); and the upcoming Younger Painters, which includes the LAC artists: Ahmed Parvez, Ali Imam, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Hanif Ramay, Moyene Najmi and Sheikh Safdar Ali. The sixty-three-page book presents thirty-five artists with a descriptive biographical note about each artist, thus serving as an index of artists working at that time. It also

²³ The selection of the artist may have been due to a number of reasons, including their social and intellectual status. This conclusion is suggested due to the fact that artists Haji Sharif (highly skilled miniature artist) and Allah Bux (painted in European academic style) never received the same kind of attention no doubt because both artists did not come from an educated background and had received their skill of painting through traditional means of learning through family members or associates. They were merely considered as *Ustads* (skilled persons) and not artists.

provides important documentation pertaining to the way art was perceived during this time of great flux.

A significant scholarly work about Pakistani art is Marcella Sirhandi's 1984 doctoral thesis entitled, *Abdur Rahman Chughtai: A Modern Pakistani Artist*. In her dissertation, Sirhandi surveys Indian painting and presents Chughtai as a Pakistani modern artist. She credits Chughtai being a modernist, not because of his artistic style, but because of his subject matter. He was still painting in the Mughal-Persian style and insisted on maintaining his position as a Muslim artist. However, his subject matter started to embrace modern life. For example, his painting *College Girls* (figure 1.11) depicted two girls dressed in modern fashions but rendered in his signature style. Sirhandi's work is a detailed biography that also includes an analysis of Chughtai's work. While contextualizing Chughtai's work in relation to the political and social circumstances of emerging Pakistan, Sirhandi also introduces another goal of modernism; capturing modern lifestyle in the artistic practices of Pakistan. This detailed study is extremely helpful in providing answers to many questions that had not been addressed earlier.

Shakir Ali wrote very few articles on art in Urdu, but those that he did are definite assets to the Pakistani understanding of art history. His informative essays on world art history include *Italian Painting*, *My Art*, *Letter to Behzad*, *Soviet Art and Artists*, and *Khayal* (Imagination). These articles were published in various Urdu magazines in an

effort to educate and bring awareness to general public.²⁴ His writings provide insight as to how he perceived art and his wish to educate Pakistani public about art and its history from around the world.

Akbar Naqvi published an extensive art historical survey in 1998, *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Pakistani Art*. This is a book of about 850 pages; biographically describing ninety-eight Pakistani artists, and the study also includes a few pre-partition artists who were predecessors of Pakistani modern art. The book addresses LAC artists as *Punj Pyare* (five beloveds) of Shakir Ali in a casual manner, and the discussion that follows contains only encyclopedic aspirations of the work limited investigations to biographies of individual LAC artists and descriptions of works of art created after the formative years.

Artist and critic, Quddus Mirza, regularly reviews exhibitions of Pakistani artists, and he has written several articles on the modern and contemporary art of Pakistan. He is highly critical of the way Pakistani art history is biographically framed around the artists in descriptive narratives rather critical studies capable of initiating any constructive discourse on art.²⁵

Nadeem Omar Tarar in his essay, “Aesthetic Modernism in the Post-Colony: The Making of a National College of Art in Pakistan (1950-1960),” provides a detailed account of the development of aesthetic modernism in post-colonial Pakistan. He opines that in the discourse of modernization in Pakistan, tradition and modernity became

²⁴ Shakir Ali, “Behzad Ke Naam,” *Humayun*, October (1954), 40-47, Shakir Ali, “Italian Painting,” *Khayaal*, (1953), 25-32, ed. By Sheema Majid, Lahore: Pakistan National Council of Arts, 1995.

²⁵ Author’s interview with Quddus Mirza in Lahore, summer 2013.

emblems of transnational stages of cultural development. He uses the Mayo School of Art (today National College of Arts Lahore, or NCA) as an example, giving a detailed account of its formation and restructuring into the National College of Arts hereafter (NCA) Lahore. He also provides an account of Shakir Ali's contribution in transforming NCA from a craft-based institute to an intellectual institution infused with Bauhaus ideas. The essay helps in understanding the formation and various stages of the progression of the only inherited art Institute of Pakistan.

More recently, there has been a growing interest in the history of modern art of Pakistan among this country's art historians with an emphasis on using critical analysis and various theoretical frameworks.²⁶ But there has still not been a significant critical analysis of LAC and its artists. The available scholarship on LAC artists is largely limited to descriptive monographs or chapters on individual artists in various books, which neither considers the broader picture of their role as the country's first modernist group, nor their engagement with modernity.²⁷ Their work has yet to be analyzed as the primary

²⁶ Iftikhar Dadi, "Anwar Jalal Shemza: Calligraphic Abstraction," *Perspectives 1*, (London: Green Cardamom, 2009). Iftikhar Dadi, *Anwar Jalal Shemza* (UK: Ridinghouse, 2015), Nadeem Omar Tarar, "Aesthetic Modernism in the Post-Colony: The Making of a National College of Art in Pakistan 1950-1960's," *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 27: 3 (2008), 332-345). Simone Willie, *Modern Art in Pakistan: History, Tradition, Place* (India: Routledge Press, 2014).

²⁷ Akbar Naqvi, *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan* (Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 1998). Amjad Ali, *Painting in Pakistan* (Pakistan: Idaare-e-Saqafat, 1983). Athar Tahir, *Lahore Colors*, (Lahore: Oxford Press, 1998). Barbara Schimtz, *Lahore Paintings, Murals and Calligraphy* (India: Marg Publications, 2010). Iftikhar Dadi, *Anwar Jalal Shemza* (UK: Ridinghouse, 2015). Ijaz ul Hasan, *Painters of Pakistan* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1991). Jalaluddin Ahmed. *Contemporary Painters of Pakistan* (Karachi: Pakistan Publications, 1954). Marjorie Husain, *Ali Imam: Man of the Arts* (Karachi: Foundation of Museum of Modern Art, 2003). Musarrat Hassan, *Zubeida Agha: A Pioneer of Modern Art in Pakistan* (Karachi: Foundation of Museum of Modern Art, 2004).

instigators of modernism in Pakistan, which carries implications for later Pakistani art and its presence on the global art scene.

Atteqa Ali in her 2008 doctoral dissertation, “Impassioned Play: Social Commentary and Formal Experimentation in Contemporary Pakistani Art,” has only briefly referred to the existence of LAC. She has analyzed art practices in Pakistan, the main pedagogical methods in art schools, and the impact of larger historical events and social processes such as colonialism, the partition of India and Pakistan, and globalization. She points out that because Pakistani artists had only looked at western art in books and catalogs, they adapted the western styles in their work but they did not embrace the doctrines of the styles. She states, “They chose modern art styles developed in Europe as the method to express their modernity.”²⁸ This dissertation will look at LAC’s embrace of modernism as much more complex idea involving subtle changes bespeaking on insipient national and even international outlook.

Art historian Iftikhar Dadi has produced seminal work on Pakistani art in its formative years. In his recent publication of 2010, *Modernism and The Art of Muslim South Asia*, he examines the work of the early decades of modern art in Pakistan. He has followed a similar trajectory to that of art historian Geeta Kapur, by grounding his research in tradition, nationalism and modernism (which he calls “cosmopolitanism”) and examining the art of Zain ul Abedin, Zubeida Agha, Shakir Ali, Abdur Rehman Chughtai, Ustad Allah Bux, Haji Sharif and Anwar Jalal Shemza. Dadi finds that these artists were using traditionalist approaches with modernist sensibilities, especially in the

²⁸ Atteqa Ali, PhD dissertation, *Impassioned Play: Social Commentary and Formal Experimentation in Contemporary Pakistani Art*, (University of Texas, 2008), 16.

case of Chughtai. Dadi highlights the impact of international modernism in these artists' works. In his opinion, these artists were engaged in a transnational modernism, which means their works were independent of national boundaries. Dadi has analyzed the works of Zainal Abedin, Shakir Ali, Abdur Rahman Chughtai, and Anwar Jalal Shemza but his studies do not focus on any particular time period of their works. Like other Pakistan writers, Dadi has not analyzed the formation of LAC in depth and mentions the presences of the group in a cursory manner.

Building upon Dadi's work on nationalism and modernism, this dissertation will examine LAC artists within the framework of postcolonialism, and it will focus on the works LAC artists produced between 1947 and 57. It will lead to a nuanced study of the work, as it will highlight the shift in these artists' works from partition to post-partition. Dadi contends that transnationalism or cosmopolitanism was inherent in the works of modernist artists; however, this study will advance the idea that although the LAC artists were progressive and did not conform to the nationalistic agenda (meaning that they did not follow the same trajectory as Chughtai in promoting Mughal-Persian Muslim inheritance), they were in actual fact sensitive to the formation of the newly established state. The migration of artists like Shemza from Simla (India) to Lahore, Ali Imam from Bombay (India) to Lahore at the time of Partition and later Shakir Ali's deliberate choice to return to Pakistan in 1952 confirms these artists belief in the new nation-state. Furthermore, the formation and naming of another group called the Pakistan Group in London, in 1958 by three of LAC artists —Anwar Jalal Shemza, Ali Imam, and Ahmed Parvez who joined forces with two artists from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), namely

Safiuddin Ahmed and Bashir Murtaza —shows that the “Pakistan” label was important for them. The artists, in fact, wanted to establish their identity as Pakistani artists but at the same time wished to transcend parochial art practices and be known as citizens of the modern world. This aspect of the group’s identity will be discussed in further detail later at the conclusion of this study in chapter 4.

C. Theoretical Framework

Pakistan is essentially a postcolonial society and LAC artists lived and produced art from colonial to postcolonial and in early national times. Frequently, Pakistani and western scholars have ignored, dismissed and devalued LAC works, considering the works of its’ members as merely derivative of western art movements.²⁹ In order to challenge the reductive reading of LAC modern development, and to provide a sustainable critical analysis of LAC art, this dissertation will use the theoretical framework of postcolonialism and related such aspects as ambivalence, hybridity, and mimicry coined by Homi K. Bhabha, one of the foremost scholars of postcolonial studies. This discussion will also rely on the work of Bill Ashcroft, Anderson Benedict, Partha Chatterjee, Stuart Hall, Ania Loomba, Ernest Renan, and Edward Said, to situate the postcolonial and nationalistic discourse in regard to the Indian subcontinent.

Postcolonial art and culture cannot be studied without referring to Said’s evaluation and critique of the set of attitudes known as “orientalism,” which provides a backdrop of postcolonial studies. In his book *Orientalism*, he highlights the inaccuracies

²⁹ This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 and 4.

of a wide variety of assumptions and constructions by the West and questions various paradigms of thought that are accepted on individual, academic, and political levels.³⁰

Said employs French philosopher Michel Foucault's, notion of *discourse* (described in *The Archeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*) to identify Orientalism. He emphatically states that:

[W]ithout examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.³¹

Using Foucault's ideas about discourse and power, Said explains that the West employed orientalism to represent the East as exotic, mysterious, distant, and unknowable in order to control it. He further argues that the relationship between Occident (colonizer) and orient (Colonized) is a relationship of power, domination, and varying degrees of hegemonic complexity.³² The Orient was orientalized not only because it was discovered to be "oriental" (in ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European), but also because it could be made oriental. For Said, there was no orient

³⁰ Danielle Sered, *Orientalism*, Fall 1996, <http://postcolonialstudies.emory.edu/orientalism/> (accessed on Oct 12, 2013).

³¹ For detail definition of Orientalism see Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1979), 2-3.

³² Hegemony is the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. This concept is important because the capacity to influence the thought of the colonized is by far the most sustained and potent operation of imperial power in colonized regions. See also Bill Ashcroft, Griffiths Gareth, and Helen Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 116.

except as an ideological invention that westerners used to subjugate the region.³³ Art historian Anne D'Alleva suggests that the colonial relationship is inherently unequal: social, political, and economic power is held by the colonizer, who exploits the colonized people and their territory.³⁴ According to Said, the colonizer perceives the colonized as a useless and lazy savage, lacking power and the ability to think. Seeing the colonized as the "Other," according to Said, legitimizes the superiority of the usual occidental colonizer and justifies the dispossession and degradation of other human beings as a natural process.

Said's critics consider his divide between the East and the West too stark and simplistic. Colonial experience, they argue, was more complicated and multifaceted, with more players and participants than this binary division allows.³⁵ Nonetheless, Said raised a set of theoretical issues, especially about representation and discourse that have been widely influential.³⁶

Hybridity, Ambivalence, and Mimicry

Rejecting Said's binaries of the East and the West, Homi K. Bhabha, in his book *Location of Culture* attests that the relationship between colonizer and colonized is much

³³ Bill Ashcroft, Griffiths Gareth and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 6.

³⁴ Anne D'Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History* (London: Lawrence King Publishing Ltd., 2005), 78.

³⁵ Bernard Lewis, Aijaz Ahmad, and Hommi K. Bhabha disagree with this stark division of East and West.

³⁶ D'Alleva. *Methods of Theories of Art History*, 79.

more complex because of the ambivalent relationship between the two, culminating in a form of hybridity which disrupts any clear division between them. Hybridity can be social, political, linguistic, ideological or any other combination of two different ideas, concepts or species. It is not necessarily a peaceful mixture, for it can be contentious and disruptive, especially in colonial situations.³⁷ Hybridity creates a third space, a place of liminality that is neither here nor fully there.³⁸ What does this mean for the colonized and the colonizer? How does it distort or reform culture? What is the power dynamics of this hybrid relationship? How does it create the possibility of resistance?³⁹

These questions can be explored through the notion of ambivalence that Bhabha also describes. Ambivalence refers to the ambiguous way in which colonizer and colonized regard one another. The colonizer often considers the colonized as both an inferior yet exotic other, while the colonized regards the colonizer as both “enviable” yet “corrupt.” According to Bhabha, it is the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizers and colonized. This relationship is ambivalent because the colonized is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. Rather than assuming that some colonized subjects are “complicit” and some “resistant,” ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating

³⁷ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies*, 118.

³⁸ Other scholars such as Ranajit Guha have also identified this third space. Gayatri Spivak quotes Guha, “While constructing the definition of the people proposes a dynamic stratification grid describing colonial social production at large. The third group on the list, the buffer group, as it were between the people and the great macro-structural dominant groups, is itself defined as a place of in-betweenness, what Derrida has described as an ‘*antre*’.” Quoted in “Can the Subaltern Speak.” *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. P. Williams and L. Chrisman, Columbia University Press, (1992), 79. See Ranajit Guha, “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India.” *Subaltern Studies I: Writing on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford Press: New York, London (1982): 1.

³⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 85-92.

manner within the colonial subject. Ambivalence also characterizes colonial discourse since the colonized subject may be exploited and nurtured at the same time.⁴⁰

Related to hybridity is the idea of identity, according to cultural theorist and sociologist, Stuart Hall, “identity is important but it is a process of imaginative rediscovery.” He is firmly against the idea of identity as true or essential and emphasizes instead that cultural identities are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power.⁴¹ He also points out that within colonial contexts, a process of “self-othering” takes place. This is distinct from Said’s orientalism, where the colonized were constructed as different by the colonizer within the categories of western knowledge. Hall points out that the colonizer had the “power to make us see and experience ourselves as “Others.”⁴² The French philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas, suggests, “the self cannot exist without Other. Self and Other are mirror images connected by their reflection.”⁴³ Bhabha also notes that neither colonizer nor colonized is independent of the other. Colonial identities on both sides of the divide are unstable and in constant flux. It is through the ambivalent relationship of the colonizer and the colonized that Bhabha challenges this experience of otherness. Bhabha theorizes that through ambivalence the authority of colonial discourse is disrupted. It is an unwelcome and unwanted aspect of colonial

⁴⁰ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, quote Homi K. Bhabha in *Post-Colonial Studie*, 13.

⁴¹ Stuart Hall. “Cultural identities and Diaspora,” in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London & Wishart, 1990), 224.

⁴² Stuart Hall. “Cultural identities and Diaspora,” 224.

⁴³ Kearney Richard, ed. "Emmanuel Levinas. " *Dialogues With Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984), 47-70.

discourse because colonizers want to produce compliant subjects who “mimic” their habits and values. Instead colonized produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never very far from mockery.

In mimicry, the colonizer compels the colonized to imitate them—to use their language, customs, religion, schooling, government etc. Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. This aspect of mimicry acts as a double-edged sword: one side of which mimics the colonizer, and in the process the colonized alienates its own language of liberty. Likewise, it produces another parodic knowledge, which may result in mockery. Even if this approach to mimicry attempts to achieve a carbon copy of the colonizer, it is not the same. Mimicry repeats but does not re-present; sometimes the colonized try harder to be equal and authentic. Bhabha argues that it is this area between the mimicry and mockery, where the reforming civilizing mission becomes a discursive process by which the slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry fixes the colonial subject as a partial presence. By partial, he means both incomplete and virtual.⁴⁴

As Bhabha posits, colonial discourse is ambivalent because the colonizer wants to disseminate knowledge to the colonized through a class of interpreters or mediators existing between the two. The colonizer, never really wants, however, the colonized to be an exact replica, as this would be too threatening to the colonizer’s ultimate authority. The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects

⁴⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *October* 28 (1984): 126.

that ensure its strategic failure so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.⁴⁵ At the intersection of European learning and colonial power, the British historian and Whig politician, the first Baron, T. B. Macaulay, in his infamous *Minutes to Indian Education* (1835) writes: “We must at present do our best to form a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions in morals and in intellect.”⁴⁶

Macaulay’s partial reform produces an empty form of imitation of English manners, which will induce the colonial subject to remain under the protection of the colonizer. Ania Loomba, scholar of postcolonial studies, suggests that the underlying premise was, of course, that Indians can mimic but can never exactly reproduce English values, and their recognition of the perpetual gap between themselves and the “real thing” will ensure their subjugation. But for Bhabha, this attitude undermines the colonial authority itself by not being able to replicate its own self perfectly.

In short, Bhabha’s concept of hybridity represents an inversion of colonial authority: it creates complexity between the colonizer and the colonized and is not simply a mix or synthesis of the two. Thus, hybridity becomes a tool to negotiate the power relationships between the colonizers and the colonized. He posits:

The place of difference and otherness . . . is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional. The strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power takes place in the ‘disturbing distance in between the colonized Self and the colonized Other. This space he calls “the

⁴⁵ Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” 128. Examples of such an effect have been quoted by several scholars such as Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 173; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 127; and Spivak, “Can a Subaltern Speak?” 77.

⁴⁶ T.B. Macaulay, “Minutes on Education,” in *Sources of Indian Tradition*, (2), ed. William Theodore de Bary, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 49.

hybrid gap” within which the subject is represented ‘in the differentiating order of otherness.’⁴⁷ Postcolonial cultures are inevitably hybridized phenomena involving a dialectic relationship between the “grafted” European cultural systems and an indigenous ontology, with its impulse to create an independent local identity. Ashcroft believes that such constructions or reconstructions only occur as a dynamic interaction between European hegemonic systems and peripheral subversions of them.⁴⁸

Modernity and Nationalism

It is important to explore the idea of modernity and nationalism in the context of LAC especially since previous scholarship on modern art of Indian subcontinent establishes a dialectical relationship between the two. Inherent to postcolonial discourse are concepts of modernity, which lead to the formation of nationalist discourses. Art historian Debashish Banerji states, “The subject of modernity is fragmented and it is constituted by a variety of distinct discourses corresponding to lived and imagined communities.”⁴⁹

Modernity is usually characterized by developments in philosophical thought. The concept of modernity is significant in the emergence of colonial discourse. The advent of the French enlightenment considered the development of the idea that modernity to be a

⁴⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 45, 58, 109, 112.

⁴⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), 195-6

⁴⁹ Debashish Banerji, “The Alternate Nation of Abanindranath Tagore,” (India: Saga Publications, New, 2010),1.

distinctive and superior period in the history of humanity. The emergence of modernity coexists with the rise of Euro-centrism and the European dominance of the world through exploration, cartography and colonization.⁵⁰ In the context of India, modernity is a social and intellectual project associated with the influence of European enlightenment rationalism from the 18th century onwards.⁵¹ At the turn of the 19th century, the Indian intelligentsia embraced the European Enlightenment, which led to the emergence of the nationalist movement against British Raj. The period is characterized by the dialectic between Colonialism and Nationalism and the construction of cultural difference in a rapid globalization of culture.⁵²

As an ideology and political doctrine, *nationalism*, in general, is understood as a claim advanced on behalf of a body of people claiming to constitute a nation, and thus the ability to establish a sovereign state over a specific territory. Once that state comes into being, it has to devise a national identity to distinguish itself from other states. In the case of new or recently established postcolonial states, the construction of a cohesive national identity is imperative.⁵³ An earlier definition that French philosopher and writer Ernest

⁵⁰ Europe came to dominate the world in the 19th century, and modernity became synonymous with civilized behavior and one major justification for the civilizing mission of European imperialism. Europe constructed itself as 'modern' and non-Europeans as 'traditional', static, pre-historical. The European models of historical change became the tool by which these colonized societies were denied any internal dynamic or capacity for development. Ashcroft, Gareth, and Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies*, 145.

⁵¹ Supriya Chaudhuri, "Modernisms in India," *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 942-960.

⁵² Mitter, *Indian Art*, 171.

⁵³ There is no absolute or objective criterion on which nationalism in general or state nationalism, in particular, can be grounded. Language, religion, common ethnic origin, historical experience, cultural heritage or civilization, common residence in the same region and various other such factors have been

Renan provided in his famous 1882 lecture, *What is a Nation?* contest the notions of national identity that rely heavily on racial, linguistic, geographical or religious determinism. He posits that countries are always more diverse in linguistic and racial heritage than national histories would like to admit. There are usually enough racial mixes and languages within the very makeup of citizenry to make the political rhetoric of racial purity obsolete.⁵⁴

In contrast to Renan's idea of nationalism, Benedict Anderson, a scholar of Asian Studies, considers nationalism to constitute modern political moral hegemony. In his seminal book, *Imagined Communities*, he defines a nation as "an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."⁵⁵ He further states that nationhood is a mental affinity. He calls it "imagined" because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. The fact that nationalists are able to imagine boundaries suggests that they recognize the existence of partition by culture, ethnicity, and social structure among mankind.⁵⁶

In the case of Pakistan, none of this is applicable because Pakistan could not sustain the religious ideology, which was the basis for its establishment. As a result, it

invoked from the time to time to construct a national identity. Ishtiaq Ahmed. "Pakistan National Identity," *International review of Modern Sociology*, 34:1(2008): 47.

⁵⁴ Renan concludes: "Now, the essence of a nation is that the people have many things in common, but have also forgotten much together." Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" text from a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11, 1882. Translated by Ethan Rundell. http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf (accessed on December 15, 2015).

⁵⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2006)3-7.

⁵⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 3-7.

was re-divided again in 1971, this time not on the basis of religion, but due to the political conflict with West Pakistan as Urdu had been declared in 1948 to be the national language of Pakistan though the majority of the population in East Pakistan spoke Bengali. This mandated language initiated bitter feelings in East Pakistan. Other economic and political issues also caused conflict between the two wings (in addition to the physical presence of India). Hence, Pakistan's eastern territories became the independent state of Bangladesh.⁵⁷

Art historian Partha Mitter in his book *The Triumph of Modernism* adopts and contextualizes Benedict's theory and points out that Bengali intelligentsia negotiated a cosmopolitan modernity largely through the print media since few had any direct physical contact with Europeans. Yet, they were deeply imbued with western literature and Enlightenment values.⁵⁸ This type of westernization had brought about the change in their thinking process and enunciated in the 1940s the Indian nationalist movement. Mitter suggests that modernity, thus, created a globally "imagined community" based upon print culture whose members may never have known one another personally, and yet shared a corpus of ideas about modernity.

Partha Chatterjee, an Indian scholar of subaltern and postcolonial studies, counters Benedict's *Imagined Community* by contending that such imagined communities acquire concrete shape through the institution of government that he ingeniously calls print-capitalism. He attests that the historical experience of nationalism in Western

⁵⁷ Iftikhar Dadi has also identified it in his book *Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 30.

⁵⁸ Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde 1922-1947*, 11.

Europe, the Americas and Russia has supplied subsequent nationalisms with a set of modular forms from which nationalist elites in Asia and Africa had chosen the ones they liked. Chatterjee's objection to Anderson's imagined community is in his words:

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. America and Europe, the true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even imaginations must remain colonized.⁵⁹

Chatterjee distances Indian historiography from the knowledge generated by the British imperial tradition, which places a universalized western subject at the center of its discourses in India, to challenge the established standard history of India. He advances the idea that Indian nationalism was not merely a political movement, but grew out of the private spiritual-cultural realm that colonialism apparently could not penetrate. He states, "It [the west and its particular set of national ideologies] failed to colonize the inner, essential, identity of the East which lay in its distinctive, and superior, spiritual culture."⁶⁰

Applicability of Theories of Postcolonialism and Nationalism to Modern Pakistan and

LAC

⁵⁹ Partha Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?" *Empire and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 26.

⁶⁰ Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?" 27.

This dissertation employs aspects of postcolonial theory as a valuable tool to understand the nuances of modern art that LAC developed in the formative years of Pakistan's nationhood and suggests using it to enhance the complex situation stemming from Partition in which a colonial society overnight became postcolonial.

Postcolonial theoretical framework is applicable to LAC in many respects; for example, LAC was formed in the immediate years (1952) of the ending of the colonialism and its artists developed a double consciousness within this newly established country that was predicated on the special legacies of colonialism, post-colonialism, and modernism they embraced. This double consciousness is different from W. E. B Du Bois' theory of double conscious that attempts to characterize people living in the two different worlds of mainstream and black culture and nuancing the same vocabulary so that it can convey one meaning to the dominant society and another to African-American's subgroup.⁶¹ In the case of LAC members, their double consciousness is different because most of the members migrated from India to Pakistan, a newly ideologically defined liberated space, which was already part of their geography and consciousness. So they were not migrating to a new continent or implanted in a different nation like the African Americans. The geographical space, culture, and for the most part other social norms were still the same for LAC members. However, it is important to note that when LAC members migrated to Pakistan, they brought with them the burden of the

⁶¹ W. E. B. Du Bois describes double consciousness as the individual's feeling, as though one's identity is divided into several parts, making it difficult or impossible to have one unified identity. He specifically uses it in the context of African Diaspora, in which the African American tries to reconcile the Black African identity with American citizenship. See W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks In Three Negro Classics* (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 207-389 (Original work published 1903)

colonial experiences in the form of their earlier training either in western academic naturalism or rapprochement with the anti-colonial Bengal School, as well as with their shared experience of pre-partition India, which then was suddenly challenged by the new country of Pakistan in which they are struggling to grapple with the new identity of the land, without giving up their personal ambitions of exploring the “new” in their work. The double consciousness of LAC members is complex because it is not only a combination of the lived and learned experiences of colonialism, but also has another layer of the indigenous shared experience of pre-partition India, which is then further layered by another consciousness in the process of being developed by the establishment of Pakistan. For example in pre-partition India artists like Anwar Jalal Shemza, who was trained in Bengal School (see *Couple*, figure 3.6), not only changed his style of painting after Partition so that it would exemplify the anti-colonial Bengal School but also the subject matter so that it would be indicative of Hindu themes.⁶² Hence, his earlier work (*Couple*, figure 3.6) embodies the colonial and shared experiences of pre-partition India. Therefore, in order to develop and discover new consciousness in the newly created space of Pakistan, LAC artists had to unlearn and break away from past experiences before setting off to engage in the discourse of modern art internationally. The double consciousness of LAC members only resembles Du Bois’ double consciousness due to the fact that LAC also had to face the dilemma of rejecting their past history of colonialism (earlier learning) and simultaneously also had to engage with the

⁶² This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

international language of modernism in order to develop a discourse of modern Pakistani art on an international level.

The postcolonial theory also is applicable to LAC, given the fact that these artists in no way could have returned to or rediscovered an absolute pre-colonial cultural purity after Partition, and nor was it possible for them “to create national and regional formations entirely independent of their historical position in the European colonial enterprise.”⁶³

In light of the discussion of hybridity above, this approach is a tool that unsettles and destabilizes the hegemony of the colonizer and empowers the colonized to subvert the power dynamics of the colonizer. Thus, enabling the colonized to establish the ‘third space’ that empowers them to perpetuate an expression that is his/her voice. Therefore, in reference to the colonial past, it was natural for LAC artists to attempt to compete with the modern world by embracing the language of modernism that happens to be the language of the colonizer. LAC members wanted to position themselves on equal footing with the colonizer. The kind of vocabulary LAC members adopted for their work was from the western world, but it did not fall into a specific kind of modern art movement of the West. Thus, hybridity provided a number of Pakistani artists the opportunity to use selectively aspects of already established traditions of art practices from two different traditions—the East and the West—to create/establish a syntax that represented their distinct and unique expression, in addition to situating their works in Bhabha’s “liminal” or “third space”- neither here nor there but somewhere floating in between, reflecting the

⁶³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, (London, New York: Routledge, 1989), 195-6.

voice that was hybrid, yet discrete. This approach will be discussed further in detail through the analysis of the works of art in chapter 3.

Not only did LAC members adopt the language of modern art from western art movements, but they also adopted western ways of living and dressing to complete the aura of modernism around themselves. Their approach was contrary to what would be the so-called “Nationalist-Islamist society” of Pakistan. Therefore, it follows that LAC works in no way fall into the categories of Islamic and nationalist adherent, in the sense of being not conservative, but instead is liberal and secular. At the same time, the LAC members valued the establishment of Pakistan and were nationalist in the sense that they used the platform of Pakistani identity to be part of an international world. Hence, their nationalist intentions were not bounded by religion, but rather by the liberal approach of being full-fledged members of the modern world.

Objectives and Contribution of this Study

Since this dissertation constitutes the first in-depth study of the Lahore Art Circle, it is the beginning of an exciting new discourse, which has been ignored in the art history of Pakistan for a long time and is in need of more in-depth investigation and debate. The purpose of this study is as follows: (1) to discuss and analyze the works of LAC as a pivotal group of artists who promoted modern art in Pakistan during its formative years and wanted to present Pakistan’s dominant art as modern; (2) to establish Shakir Ali as the active participant of LAC and acknowledge his critical contributions to this group, which has not been explored in previous art historical scholarship; (3) to highlight the

differences and similarities of the works of LAC members in terms of technique, subject matter, and style by comparative analyses; (4) to use the theoretical framework of postcolonialism to offer another lens to look at LAC members' work as hybrid and not derivative; (5) to propose Progressive Arts Group as a model for LAC, and to draw similarities and differences between the two, to suggest a possible manifesto for LAC; and (6) to highlight the role of the United States Information Center Murree in promoting modern art in Pakistan, which has not been explored in previous scholarship.⁶⁴

Through the critical analysis of the newly discovered works that LAC painters produced between 1947 to 1958, this study proposes to show that each of the LAC artists was developing a personal syntax by selectively accepting elements of several western modern art movements simultaneously in their works. The common aspect among these artists as a group was not a single stylistic strategy that cohered their work into a single artistic movement. Instead, the shared keenness and quest for experimentation and self-expression in a newly emerging nation led them to follow a distinctly different path from their previous generation of artists. This meant engaging with international modern art and inventing and contextualizing a Pakistani modern artistic idiom (synonymous to western art), which was free of any traditional or cultural burdens of style and more representative of experimentation with the chosen medium. With the exception of Shakir Ali, LAC artists did not have the opportunity of the first-hand experience of western

⁶⁴ Dadi contends, "...from the 1950s onward, Pakistan had become a veritable cold war proxy for the United States. The pro-United States foreign policies in Pakistan were accompanied by domestic repression of leftist intellectual and activists, including the persecution of members of the All Pakistan Progressive Writers association in Lahore and Karachi, which included some of the most prominent intellectual and writers of the country. *Art of Muslim South Asia*, 95-96

modern art movements by visiting or studying in Paris, London, or New York—the then centers for preferred modernism in the West. Rather, their exposure to it was through Shakir Ali and through the books and catalogs they could access at the British Library Lahore. Nonetheless, they were interested in initiating a critical dialogue with international modernism.

This study is vital in understanding the construction of nationalism by the nation-state and the role of artists assumed in grounding their political change. While the state was silently encouraging the Islamic nationalist agenda, neither did LAC members conform to the nationalist State ideology nor did they embrace the politically motivated rhetoric of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in their work. They carefully tried to create a balance between the two. The works they created cannot be placed in the categories of nationalism or Islamic art. Instead, their approach was secular, liberal, and progressive. They wanted to be members of a dynamic world where they could represent Pakistan as a modern nation.

By contextualizing the works of LAC artists in relation to postcolonial theories (and its various aspects of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry), the study will represent a contribution to post-colonial scholarship, while challenging the commonly perceived ideas of modern art from non-western culture as derivative and unoriginal.⁶⁵ It will also demonstrate the specificity of the Pakistani context. By situating modernism in the

⁶⁵ In the context of modern art of India, Partha Mitter in “Interventions: Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 90, no.4 (2008); Yashodhara Dalmia in *The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives*, (New Delhi, India: The Oxford University Press, 2001); and Geeta Kapur in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, Tulika Press, New Delhi, India, 2000 have also contested and addressed the idea of derivative and unoriginal transplant.

context of Pakistan, this study will also enhance the understanding of Pakistani art history in the broader field of South Asian Studies. Additionally, it will also initiate a critical discourse of modernism not only in the context of Asia but also internationally.

This study will also propose that The Progressive Art Group (PAG), established on the evening of Partition, was a model for LAC. Like PAG, LAC's disposition was towards international modernism and, instead of being attached to any one singular western art movement of modernism, they were looking at various examples of modern art movements in Paris, Munich, London and New York. LAC artists were inspired by the larger modernist language and movements of international abstraction such as grid-inspired structures, rejection of representational illusion, use of straight-edged shapes with simplified line drawing, use of flat, and heavily textured vivid colors. Thus, LAC painters invented an innovative and multifaceted visual idiom of modern.

Methodology

The goal of this research study is to analyze the works of individual LAC artists, created between 1947 and 1957, and the role of LAC as a seminal group in the fine arts of the newly established Pakistan. For this research, core art historical methods of investigation, interpretation, and analyses (primary documentation and archival research within the framework of postcolonial theories) will be employed.

Since none of LAC artists is alive, their works of art have become primary resource for research. To conduct this study, documentation of representative works of each of the artists produced between 1947 and 1957 have been undertaken. Some works

were unpublished and unknown to the general public as they were housed in private residences and offices.⁶⁶ Also, some early works of LAC artists are only available as black-and-white reproductions in various magazines such as *Contemporary Pakistani Art Quarterly* (produced between 1948-1960), the University of the Punjab exhibition catalogs and the Military Gazettes, while some exist in the forms of photographs in private archives.⁶⁷ These images, even in black and white, are pivotal for the narrative and analysis this dissertation will undertake. Locating the actual works of art, mostly in private collections was the most difficult task of this research. For last three and a half years this search has led to contacts in Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Murree, London, and Houston, with artists' relatives, friends, colleagues, collectors, art critics, as well as the galleries that collected and exhibited the LAC works.

Since there is a scarcity of published material, oral histories have been important in order to reconstruct and understand the history and environment of the formative years when LAC artists were actively working. This study relies on numerous interviews with immediate family members, friends, art critics, collectors, and writers who had

⁶⁶ See the appendices for the details of the collection. During the research for this dissertation, it was possible to find and document the significant amount of works, although they were not all from the early period. For example for Sheikh Safdar Ali thirty-five works were recovered alone from his son Nasir Ali, who currently resides in Texas. In addition thirty more works of Sheikh Safdar Ali were discovered in Lahore Museum, which were donated to the Lahore Museum by his youngest son Asif Ali. These works were in the Museum storage and have not been displayed. Similarly, Moyene Najmi produced very few works but two of his significant paintings have been discovered in a private collection. Previously they were reproduced in black and white. Even the other works, which had been produced in color in various publications, were bad color reproductions and it was pleasantly surprising to see some of these works in person. For example, Ali Imam's early works were in the collection of Hamid Haroon, an avid art collector and CEO of *Dawn* newspaper in Karachi was a rare find. Salman Shahid, son of Saleem Shahid, who was the secretary of LAC also had rare works of Ali Imam at his residence in Lahore.

⁶⁷ Mrs. Ali Imam in Karachi, Nasir Ali son of Sheikh Safdar, and Faqir Ijaz uddin, Salima and Hashmi generously shared their private archives.

connections or had some encounter with LAC. The list of interviews run longer, but only the most significant have been mentioned here:

Mrs. Ali Imam
Mrs. Moyene Najmi
Mrs. Mary Shemza
Nasir Ali, Ghazanfar Ali, Zahida Ali (children of Sheikh Safdar Ali)
Masooma Habib and Mahjabeen Habib (daughters of Mariam Habib one of the LAC member)
Ghazala Shaukat and Nabila Ahmed (nieces of Ahmed Parvez)
Amir Agha (nephew of Zubeida Agha)
Professor Salima Hashmi (Former Principal of National College of Art Lahore, art educationist, art curator, writer, artist, and daughter of Faiz Ahmed Faiz)
Professor Naazish Atta Ullah (former Principal of National College of Art Lahore)
Quddus Mirza (art critic and artist);
Asim Akhtar (art critic)
Dr. Nadeem Omar Tarar (Director of National College of Art Rawalpindi)
Late Intizar Husain (renowned Pakistani writer)
Dr. Ijaz ul Hassan and Musarat Hassan (artists and writers)
Amina Pataudi, (Director of Shakir Ali Museum Lahore)
Nayyar Ali Dada (renowned Pakistani architect who designed Shakir Ali's house, current Shakir Ali Museum)
Shahid Jalal (artist and son of Hamid Jalal-writer)
Kishwar Nahid (poet)
Wahab Jaffar (artist, collector, and close friend of Ahmed Parvez)
Shahid Salman and Khursheed Shahid (son and wife of late Saleem Shahid, secretary of LAC)
Dr. Aijaz Anwar (art educator and writer)
Athar Tahir (writer)

To access the few rare publications and documentations of LAC, there have been visits to Lahore Museum library, Lahore Art Council office, Alhamra Permanent Collection, Alhamra Library, Government College Lahore Library, Dayal Singh College Library, Lahore Fort Library, Punjab University Library, National College of Arts Archive, Punjab Public Library, National Gallery of Islamabad, National Gallery Library, National Archive of Islamabad, and Karachi Arts Council. In addition, several email

communications with Jalaluddin Ahmed (author of the first art history book on Pakistan art in 1954), Iftikhar Dadi (art historian), Professor Jonathan Mark Kenoyer (Archeologist and Anthropologist), and Susan Huntington (art historian) have proven most helpful.

Chapters Summary

Chapter 1, “Hybridity and the Discourse of Tradition and Modernity,” discusses the idea of modernism and modernity within the context of the Indian subcontinent. This chapter gives a brief overview of the prevalent state of fine arts in colonial India to underscore the specific aesthetic movement known as modernism in the context of the Indian subcontinent and its complexity, as there have been multiple movements of modernism, with the rise and fall of political situations and economical changes, in colonial India. While discussing the various strands of modernism in the visual arts of colonial India, hybridity will be viewed as having the inherent characteristic of art production in India, due to its geographical and political history and population of various ethnicities and races. These circumstances have contributed toward the hybrid and eclectic character of Indian civilization. The discussion of the art practices of pre-partition India in this chapter is also meant to connect and establish the fact that Pakistani art cannot be viewed in isolation as starting its history in 1947, instead, it needs to be seen as a continuation of the art historical narrative of ancient India. The history only bifurcates in 1947 with the division of the Indian subcontinent. Pakistani art, in general, did not spring up overnight with the Partition, and the modern art of Pakistan cannot be

analyzed without looking into the previous narrative since it is grounded in the Indian tradition. In the second half of the chapter, there is an overview of the art practices in Pakistan right after independence and before the formation of LAC to demonstrate the prevalent state of fine arts and the specific conditions that instigated this group's founding.

In Chapter 2, "Shakir Ali and Founding of Lahore Art Circle," contest the previous notion in the art historical scholarship of Pakistan that credits Shakir Ali as a tacit mentor for LAC. In this chapter, Shakir Ali is viewed as an active member of the LAC and based on LAC meeting minutes from its 1958 meeting. In the light of this argument, there is a detailed account of Shakir Ali's work before his return to Lahore and his catalyzing role behind the founding of the LAC and its propagation of modern art in Pakistan. The analysis of Shakir's work produced between 1947 and 1952 onwards, establishes the progression of modern syntax in his work, which started out as a traditional Bengal School style painting and then turned to abstraction during his time spent in Europe. Shakir's role as an artist, mentor, thinker and intellectual who defined modern art that flourished in Pakistan through LAC is further highlighted.

In addition, this chapter also proposes Progressive Art Group (PAG) of India, founded on August 14, 1947—as a parallel case study to LAC and it appears to have served as a model for LAC. The analysis of PAG is critical to understanding the formation and function of LAC because PAG was established before LAC. PAG was the first artistic group to define modernity in the language of visual art on the other side of the border under similar conditions of postcolonialism. This is an interesting case study

as LAC created a parallel modernism in Pakistan later in 1952. Comparison of the two demonstrates that there are obvious similarities and connections that exist between them.

Chapter 3, “Paradigm Shift: Towards Abstraction,” discusses modernism in the context of Pakistan which did not proceed in a linear chronological fashion of style, subject, or technique. While analyzing the works of the six LAC artists and drawing a comparative analysis between their styles and subject matter, it is evident that LAC members were not only spurning the orientalist and academic painting tradition while struggling to establish an idiom synonymous to the international art scene, but they were also trying not to fall into the trap of nationalism or Islamic rhetoric of the newly established state. In doing so, the role of United States Information Center, Murree (USIC), as an active participant in promoting LAC will be investigated. The importance of this agency has not yet been researched in any depth in previous art historical scholarship of Pakistan. To support this insight an excerpt of an official classified document from United States National Archive will be cited to shed light on the role of USIC in Murree.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section I, briefly addresses the biographies of the artist in reference to postcolonial discourse. Since the artists lived and worked through the change from colonial to postcolonial times and nationalism, aspects of postcolonial discourse are inherently embedded in the early life and educational background of these artists. This history has shaped the way art making progressed in LAC from a colonial to the postcolonial environment. Section II gives an account of exhibition venues and highlights the role of United States Information Center, Murree, in

supporting and sponsoring various LAC exhibitions to promote the artists' vision of modernity in Pakistan. Section III addresses the earlier works of LAC members that were produced before its founding. These works include a mix of European academic style of painting and the Bengal School style painting. Although there is no linear progression in the production and development of modern syntax in the works of LAC members, a thematic organization will be proposed based on the chronology of works produced between 1952 to 1958 for the sake of developing a cohesive narrative. This part of the dissertation will also synthesize different approaches that LAC artists adapted while looking at the mainstream, western modern art, and how their works function and associate with each other whereas retaining their distinctly varied and particular styles. However, it must be noted that this thematic analysis does not in any way imply any strict or rigid strategy that LAC was following. In fact, they continued their experimentation in various techniques and subject matter, which in itself was a modernistic approach.

Chapter 4, "Lahore Art Circle to Pakistan Art Group London: An End and A New Beginning," examines the role of LAC artists as a group and its impact and contributions to art education and the opening of new gallery spaces in Pakistan to further the shaping of critical dialogue within modernist art practices in Pakistan. It also briefly discusses the direction of the works of LAC members after 1957, when the group started to disperse. Three of the six LAC members migrated to London and formed another art circle called the Pakistan Art Group in collaboration with two artists from East Pakistan. The formation of this group further strengthens and clarifies LAC's importance and germinal power.

After a detailed study of the works of individual artists in relation to statements about their work and their critical responses to western modernism, this study will focus on specific type of modernism manifested in the works of LAC artists. The conclusion will examine their characteristics and, it will problematize the tensions and debates that made the contemporary terms of “modernism” and “nationalism” such galvanizing, important and highly debatable topics.

Chapter 1

Hybridity: Discourse of Tradition and Modernity in Colonial India

This chapter will contextualize the future direction of fine art in Pakistan by giving a brief overview of the prevalent art practices (in painting) in the Indian subcontinent with the beginning of colonialism in India from 1757 to 1947 (Partition).⁶⁸ By describing various social and political conditions in colonial India, this dissertation contends that Indian art has always been rich, eclectic, and hybrid due to its merger with various cultures and civilizations. Furthermore, the fine art field has time and again experienced several movements of modernism (due to political conditions of India) in conjunction with modernity, which does not necessarily parallel the modern movements of the West after its Industrial Revolution.

1.1 Modernism and Modernity in the context of Indian Subcontinent

According to Stuart Hall:

Modernity is a way of producing and classifying knowledge. The emergence of modern societies is marked by the birth of a new intellectual and cognitive world which in the case of West, gradually emerged with the Reformation, the

⁶⁸ From hereafter the historic partition of Indian subcontinent in 1947 it will be referred as “Partition.”

Renaissance, the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, and the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.⁶⁹

In the context of the Indian subcontinent, modernity as a social and intellectual project is associated with the influence of the European enlightenment and rationalism beginning in the 18th century.⁷⁰ As discussed in the introduction, at the turn of the 19th century the European Enlightenment was internalized by the Indian intelligentsia, thus giving rise to the nationalist movement. The period is characterized by the dialectic between colonialism and nationalism and the construction of cultural difference in a rapid globalization of culture.⁷¹ During the British Raj, the introduction of art schools, art exhibitions, the process of mechanical reproduction and establishment of other modern institutions in India was all part of westernization, which transformed artist's status and outlook as well as art patronage- especially when art was utilized as an act of resistance to anti-colonialism as well as display of Indian Nationalism.

This section will give a brief overview of the history of painting practices in colonial India, beginning with the arrival of British in 1757 and concluding with the Partition. This account will demonstrate that the specific aesthetic movement known as modernism in the Indian subcontinent entails complexity, as multiple modernism movements existed and were affected by political and economic changes in the transition from colonial India to post-colonial India and Pakistan. In the context of Indian

⁶⁹ Stuart Hall, *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies* (Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 4.

⁷⁰ Supriya Chaudhuri, "Modernisms in India," *Modernisms in India*: in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 942-960.

⁷¹ Mitter, *Indian Art*, 171.

subcontinent the fine arts need to be first analyzed in light of the intellectual ideas that developed in tandem with colonialism and then were resistant to the colonial era, which has been spelled out by such intellectuals and artists as Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941), Jamini Roy (1887-1972), Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), and Raja Ravi Varma (1848 -1906), and with the Partition, the fine arts took another turn when nationalism and religion played a vital role in defining another kind of modernism. Therefore, the plural use of the term “modernism[s]” in the context of the Indian subcontinent does not refer and align with the “classic” use of modern art movement of the West. Instead, it is directly related to modernity that relays specific forms of consciousness within the unique and dynamic political scene of colonial and then national India.⁷² Indian art historian, Geeta Kapur notes that: “It [modernism] has a paradoxical value involving a continuous double-take. Sometimes it serves to make indigenist issues and motifs progressive and sometimes it seems to subvert if not nationalism, then that on which it rests and purports to grow, that is tradition.”⁷³ Kapur nicely sums up the back and forth interchange between the use of tradition and modernity both for and against colonialism and Indian nationalism. Raja Ravi Varma takes up easel,

⁷³ Europe came to dominate the world in the 19th century, and modernity became synonymous with civilized behavior thereby becoming a major justification for the civilizing mission of European imperialism. Europe constructed itself as “modern” and constructed the non-European as “traditional,” static, and pre-historical. The European models of historical change became the tool by which these societies were denied any internal dynamic or capacity for development. Modernity is usually characterized by developments in philosophical thought. It is the way of producing and classifying knowledge. The concept of modernity is significant in the emergence of colonial discourse. The advent of the French enlightenment in 18th century initiated the development of the idea that modernity was a distinctive and superior period in the history of humanity. The emergence of modernity coexists with the rise of Eurocentrism and the European dominance of the world through exploration, cartography and colonization. See Ashcroft, Gareth and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 145, and Geeta Kapur, “National /Modern,” in *When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practices* (India: Tulika, 2000), 292.

canvas, and oil painting of western art to initiate a modernist discourse. In reaction, Abanindranath Tagore reverts to traditional Indian miniature painting and initiates the Bengal School in order to project Indian nationalism. Rabindranath Tagore reflects on the Bengal School and adapts the language of abstraction. Jamini Roy reverts back to folk art and revitalizes it with a view to the urban art market. Amrita Sher-Gil introduces another modern idiom in which she translates her training in Parisian naturalism at Ecole De Beaux to the needs of Indian subject matter.

Considering the notion of multiple modernisms (resulting from colonialism and later the rise of nationalism), and the fact that Indian modern art was not parallel to the western art movements, it is imperative to understand the nuances that the development of modern art in India entailed. The notion that modern art in India cannot be considered parallel to western modern art also provides the ground to challenge and destabilize the Eurocentric canon of modernism, which insists on reading modern art produced in non-western cultures as derivative and an unoriginal transplant.

Over the course of several centuries, due to its geographical location, the Indian subcontinent has been home to various races and ethnicities such as Central Asians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Africans, Persians, Turks, Dutch, Danish and Portuguese, all of which have contributed towards the hybrid and eclectic character of Indian civilization. In addition, the British colonization naturally brought in the inevitable element of hybridity to Indian culture and aesthetics. However, the term “hybridity” in this study references Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity, as discussed earlier in the introduction. Bhabha defines hybridity as a synthesis of two different social, political, ideological

ideas, concepts or cultures that is not always peaceful and which disrupts the colonial authority and creates the “ Third Space of Enunciation.” He notes that “cultural identities always emerge in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why the hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or “purity” of cultures are untenable.”⁷⁴

Using colonialization and anti-colonialism as a backdrop for the Indian political and social developments, this section will note various artistic trends in colonial India that were precursors of its mid 20th-century modern art, which inherently reflected the hybridization of eastern and western aesthetics. Likewise, it will also explain that the history of Pakistani art does not abruptly starts from 1947 with the formation of the new nation-state. Instead, the type of modern art initiated by LAC after Partition will be connected and analyzed in reference to its historical roots in the Indian subcontinent (British India).⁷⁵

All of the above points are vital to a discussion of what modern art meant during and after the colonial era in India. In pre-partition India, the explicit engagement of art with the discourse of nationalism of colonial India and its back-and-forth shift between the Indian folk art (often termed as primitive) and western artistic trends embody the Indian artists’ urge to be modern in order to break away from certain traditions and adapt the language of the colonizer. But at the same time, Indian artists also desired to resist

⁷⁴ Bhabha. *Location of Culture*, 37.

⁷⁵ Most historians of Pakistani art start their narratives from 1947 using only Muslim artists who migrated or were already living in Pakistan at the time of Partition. This includes, Abdul Rahman Chughtai, ZainulAbedin, Fyzee Rahamin, and Hassan Askari. They do not connect the history of Pakistani art to its origins in the pre-partition Indian subcontinent.

colonialism, which alludes to what Bhabha refers as the ambivalent relationship of the colonized with the colonizer. This back and forth dialogue between nationalism and western inclinations in which certain aspects of western modern aesthetics are incorporated into the art production in order to be on equal footing with the colonizer, while simultaneously subverting modern aesthetics while enhancing traditional ones, enacts the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between the colonizers and colonized. This relationship is ambivalent because the colonized is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer.

1.2 Historical Context and Hybridity in the Art of Colonial India

As discussed earlier in the introduction, Britain first colonized the Indian subcontinent in 1757 through the East India Company, uniting it under the British Raj and making it the crown jewel of its empire. Colonialism affected the traditional Indian culture, art, and literature. The British Empire brought reforms and changes in every walk of life. These innovations included building bridges, and railway lines, establishing and reforming laws of the country, educational system, and cultivating traditional Indian aesthetics. However, all reforms were directly related to the cause of benefitting the British Empire. The ideology of progress contributed to a sense of cultural superiority that became the hallmark of the British Empire.⁷⁶ In the field of fine arts, the British

⁷⁶ Ania Loomba in her book, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* raises several questions as to what was so inherently powerful about the Englishmen who were able to establish such an organized, unified empire far away from their motherland. One explanation might be that the earlier colonization was pre-capitalist, while modern colonialism was established alongside capitalism in Western Europe. Modern colonialism did more than exact tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered; it restructured the economies of the latter, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between the colonized and

promoted European academic oil paintings,⁷⁷ including portraiture, naturalistic landscape, and nude paintings. The following section will review the various changes in the field of fine arts with the beginning of the colonial era in India, and the evolution of various artistic trends till the end of colonialism with hybridity as the overarching theme, resulting in a dialectic between colonialism and nationalism.

Company Painting

With the fall of Indian power in the late 18th century and the rise of colonialism in India, the first change in the artistic arena was the loss of courtly patronage. Indian court painters were uprooted from the Mughal courts, and as a result, they became jobless and started looking for alternate means and resources to earn their livelihood. Earlier the royal courts were the patrons of the arts and had commissioned artists to record the history of the Mughal emperors via portraits, war scenes, hunting scenes, important royal events, celebrations and illuminated manuscripts.⁷⁸ Their painting surface was a hand-made paper called “Wasli,” which they painted with pigments acquired from local minerals, vegetables, and flowers. The artists enjoyed the patronage of Mughal emperors and painted small-scale miniature paintings, which would eventually form small

colonial countries. In whichever direction human beings and raw materials travelled, the profits always flowed back to the so-called ‘mother country’. For details see *Colonialism/Postcolonialism: The New Critical Idioms* (Routledge: London and New York, 1988).

⁷⁷ Naturalistic academic painting imported from Paris. It will be referred to as European academic painting, since it was a mix of various aesthetic tradition of naturalism from various parts of Europe. It was directly imported to India from Britain.

⁷⁸ Pran Nevile. *Marvel of Indian Painting: Rise and Demise of Company School* (Gurgaon, India: Nevile Books, 2007), 3.

illuminated manuscripts. The earlier court painters worked in schools or ateliers, where several artists painted on a single painting according to their specific expertise.⁷⁹

Initially, the new British rulers were interested in collecting the illustrated manuscripts and miniature paintings but not in commissioning them. These highly skilled artists already had inherited and perfected artistic influences from Persia, Rome, Greece, and even Europe in their Indian miniature painting and manuscripts. They quickly realized the British attraction to the everyday life, scenery, religious rituals, celebrations, cast, costumes, flora, and fauna of India; hence, they started making small folios of Indian paintings that would depict such themes. These folios were highly sought after by British tourists, who wanted to take tokens of Indian life back to England. The new genre of painting also encouraged a number of British artists to visit India in the 1760s in search of fame and fortune. They were the first to draw true-to-life pictures of the Indian panorama. Lured by the prospect of prosperous life, most Indian artists engaged themselves in making pictures of the *sahibs* (a term locally used for English men), native princes or historical events of imperial interest. The amateur British artists, on the other hand, applied their talents to depicting Indian people and their ways of life. They had received training in drawing and watercolor painting, which had formed an essential part of the liberal education in England. But the forms and proportions of Indian bodies were different from what they were used to drawing. Soon the British artists realized that Indian artists were better in depicted such subjects as these, so they decided to

⁷⁹ The master artist laid out the composition and painted the faces at the end, while other individual artists that were experts in painting foliage, landscape, patterns, or clothing completed their part of painting.

commission local Indian painters to paint the themes in which they had interest.⁸⁰ Under the impression that the Indian artists lacked the ability to learn perspective and illusionism, and in order to educate and develop a good taste among Indian artists, the British gave instruction to these painters, enabling them to adopt certain western techniques and styles. Such styles included the usage of watercolor instead of the traditional gouache⁸¹ and the use of linear perspectives and naturalistic renderings of figures instead of multiple perspectives. What resulted from such efforts was the development of the so-called Company painting—a hybrid of Indian court painting and the European naturalism in which the theme, subject matter, and technique were exotic and Indian, but the style was western. It flourished in India from 1760 to 1860.⁸²

Untitled (figure 1.1) is an example of the hybrid style of company painting. In this untitled painting the artist depicts three male and three female figures in a religious procession for *Darshan* (an opportunity or occasion for seeing a holy person or the image of a deity) with various characters responsible for different duties, such as singing hymns, playing a drum, or distributing *Prasad* (food given out to the devotees as a gift from the deity). The male and female figures are alternately arranged in the picture frame. The central figure is the most important as she is carrying the deity on her head and is the

⁸⁰ Archer Mildred. *Company Paintings: Indian Paintings of the British Period* (London: Victoria Albert Museum, 1992), 17.

⁸¹ Traditional Indian painters used mineral pigments mixed with powdered conch shells or Zinc oxide.

⁸² The company approach was not defined by one style. Rather, local artistic traditions influenced the paintings produced in different cities throughout India. The degree to which artists incorporated western techniques into their work also varied. The detailed brush strokes in this image, for instance, have precedents in earlier Mughal studies of animals, while the receding landscape points to European influence, as does the shading and the use of muted watercolors in place of brilliantly colored gouaches. See Pran Nevile, *Marvel of Indian Painting*, 3.

focus of the painting, alluding to the typical characteristic of traditional Indian miniature painting in which hierarchical scales are used according to the importance and status of the figure. All the figures are rendered against a flat background, notable for the small attachments of shadows to each of the character feet indicative of western aesthetics. The figures are shown in a three-quarter and side profile. Their eye sockets are heavily shaded.

The painting has been rendered in the fine miniature technique of watercolor, but the somber color palette of earth colors is unlike that of traditional Indian miniature painting, which typically consists of vibrant colors. The treatment of space in the background is flat and unlike the traditional style of Indian painting. The body proportions are highly naturalistic in the western style, and the figures are arranged in a rhythmical manner. The object on the head of the central figure is rendered three-dimensionally with the use of western perspective. The painting is very different from the Indian miniature paintings in terms of its scale since latter were painted on a very small scale. Contrary to the previously scholarly approach, this study proposes that the genre of company painting was not only hybrid but also modern because it broke from the past tradition of court paintings/Mughal Miniature in its technique, scale, and subject matter, and its stylistic convention, hence, was a mix of the eastern and western aesthetics.

Company painting started to decline as the Indian ruler and the leading elites of India turned their attention toward Victorian art, sitting for portraits by European artists and collecting their works. With these new tendencies in the arts beginning in 1854, the British Raj started to implement European academic art education in India. The idea was

part of the project to westernize natives and train them in naturalistic drawing skills to modernize and improve Indian taste and eventually to produce marketable commodities that would cater to the European market.⁸³ Four major craft centers were established in colonial India: the Government School of Industrial Arts, Madras (1852), Calcutta Art School (1858), Bombay School of Arts (1864), and Mayo School of Art Lahore (1872).⁸⁴ Gradually, European academic art became popular but with only few artists, mostly among the class of Indian artists familiar with English taste. Among these, the most celebrated academic artist was Raja Ravi Varma.

Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906)

Raja Ravi Varma was a member of the ruling family of Kerala, initially trained in the local tradition of the Tanjore School, and learned oil painting from the Dutch portrait painter Theodor Jenson (1857-1943) in the Travancore court.⁸⁵ His work broke from tradition and was different from everything that was previously in practice, such as company painting or Mughal and Rajput miniatures. His art deviated from the indigenous practices in its use of such western materials as canvas instead of paper, oil paints instead of tempera and watercolor, and large pictures rather than small, hand-held manuscript

⁸³ Mitter, *Indian Art*, 174.

⁸⁴ For details see, Partha Mitter, *Art and Colonialism in Colonial India 1850-1922* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 47.

⁸⁵ He was very impressed by the works of the English painter Theodore Jensen (when he visited the court in 1868), and the court painter Ramaswamy Naidu. Although Jensen and Naidu refused to train Varma due to the possibility of future rivalry, Varma watched them paint. Mitter, *Art and Colonialism in Colonial India 1850-1922*, 181.

paintings. His fascination with western art resulted in his introduction of modern elements in traditional Hindu iconography. His art became a hybrid of the western convention of academic painting; he populated the Hindu *Puranas*, with palpable, desirable human beings instead of the earlier traditional rendering of the deities as iconographic types.⁸⁶ In *Sita* (figure 1.2), Varma depicts a romantic landscape as the background of the Hindu goddess Sita, the wife of Rama, who is venerated by all Hindu women as an icon for wifely and womanly virtues. Varma renders Sita not as if she is another worldly creature but as an attractive and accessible human being. Although her facial features are perfect and without any flaws, it is the rendering of the flesh of her body and her slouching sitting posture that makes her so accessible. What does this mean to give the goddess this human characteristic? Is the artist challenging the pre-existing religious ideas of gods as celestial beings or is he suggesting that there is a goddess in every domestic woman? Mitter states: “His [Varma’s] approach was of a modernist artist that coincided with the western ideas - where the paintings were suppose to melt the soul into a tender participation in human miseries.”⁸⁷

In terms of both conceptual and formal representation, Varma was a modern artist. Furthermore, he was the first Indian artist to introduce oleographs in India by setting up his lithography studio in Mumbai in 1894. He started printing and mass producing his own oil paintings and circulating the fine art of the Indian bourgeoisie to ordinary people in the form of poster art. The western depiction of gods and goddesses,

⁸⁶ The gods, until then, had been delineated entirely in symbolic terms, but acquired individualistic features in Varma’s work. Mitter, *Art and Colonialism in Colonial India 1850-1922*, 202.

⁸⁷ Mitter, *Art and Colonialism in Colonial India 1850-1922*, 202.

which at one point were only produced as one-of-a-kind paintings and belonged to the richest of the elites, now became household items for common Hindus; such widespread distribution is itself a modernist idea. The kind of modernism that Varma introduced in his aesthetics not only entailed hybrid characteristics of the East and the West but his use of technology is also linked to the notion of social modernity.

By the turn of the 20th century, nationalism surged and anticolonial sentiments started to rise in India. Bengal was the first Indian state to possess a rich and modern milieu because of the growth of a lively emergent middle class in the bustling city of Calcutta, which was the capital of Bengal. This new class was largely constituted of the higher caste of Hindus who opted for fashionable western learning and through it were suddenly confronted with vast fields of original thought. The emphasis was on a liberal education system, resulting in the establishment of several new colleges that produced a number of civic-minded leaders who were subsequently instrumental in developing political and social consciousness leading to nationalism. Calcutta also became an active publishing center.⁸⁸

Throughout the 19th century, there was a gradual increase of political consciousness that united the new educated classes and engaged them in the constructive activity of developing Indian nationalism and defying the British Raj. As Bengal started to become the center for Indian nationalism, the British were threatened by its strength. In order to weaken it, the Viceroy of India Lord Curzon (1899–1905), proposed the partition

⁸⁸ Jaya Appasamy, *Abinandranth Tagore and the Art of his Time 1918-1984* (New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1968), 5.

of Bengal. The official reason was stated as an administrative convenience due to Bengal's size, but the partition itself was based on a religious and political agenda. In 1905, Bengal was divided into East Bengal and Assam. The British tried to curb Bengali influence on the nationalist movement and also introduced a new form of partition based on religious affiliations (Hindu and Muslim) to create challenges for the Indian National Congress, which was slowly becoming the main opponent of British rule. But Indian nationalists understood the play of partition and condemned it unanimously, starting the anti-partition (of Bengal) and the *Swadeshi* movement, which was characterized by civil disobedience.

The *Swadeshi* initiative was part of the Indian independence movement and played a pivotal role in developing Indian nationalism. It was instigated by Mohandas K. Gandhi (1883-1948) and combined Indian asceticism with progressive western concept of socialism to motivate ordinary Indians to rise against colonialism. Hence, *Swadeshi* movement was an economic strategy aimed at removing the British Empire from power and improving economic conditions in India by following the principles of *swadeshi* (self-sufficiency of local resources). The incipient nationalist movement came together and resolved to boycott the imported British products and encouraged the use of domestic/local products and production processes. People burnt imported clothes and goods and picketed the native-owned shops selling foreign goods.⁸⁹ Prominent among the creators of this new, conscious Bengali culture were members of the Tagore family. Their family home in Calcutta was the center for creative activities. Many members of the

⁸⁹ Mitter, *Art and Colonialism in Colonial India 1850-1922*, 302-304.

Tagore family did not have to earn their living and could devote their entire lives to the pursuit of learning, especially to writing, music and painting. The family produced many prominent writers, painters, philosophers, and poets, such as Nobel Prize winner in Literature Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, Sunyani Devi (1875-1962), Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938).⁹⁰ Under the aforementioned changing political circumstances of the early twentieth century and in defiance of the British Raj, several modernist trends in the fine arts surfaced simultaneously. One of the major trends was the emergence of The Bengal School of Art, founded by Abanindranath Tagore in 1906, which became synonymous with the *Swadeshi* Movement.

The Bengal School of Art and Abanindranath Tagore

The Bengal School of Art (commonly referred as Bengal School) marked the coming of age of Indian art and artists in nationalistic terms, as it self-consciously reverts back to the roots of indigenous Indian painting but with a new highly intellectual approach. As mentioned earlier, Abanindranath Tagore was at the forefront of the movement. He had already disconnected himself from earlier western academic painting. His British artist, teacher, and head of the art school of Calcutta Ernest Binfield Havell (1861-1934) encouraged him to pay attention to Indian aesthetics and spiritualism as opposed to the materialism of the West. Other foreigners such as Sister Nivedita (1867-1911), an Irish teacher and student of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), and Stella Kramrisch (1896-1993), an American art historian, also discouraged European academic

⁹⁰ Appasamy, *Abinandranth Tagore and the art of his Time 1918-1984*, 5; and Tapati Guha Thakurta, *The Making of a New Indian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 274.

art education in the art school established by the British, and instead, tried to encourage Indian artists to understand and emphasize the importance of reverting back to traditional Indian aesthetics.⁹¹

The Bengal School was a break from the prevalent European academic style practices that Ravi Varma and other artists had previously established. The Bengal School consciously embraced numerous technical and conceptual influences; including Mughal miniature painting, Japanese wash technique, pan-Asian ideals and emergent Indian nationalist art historical writings from the first decade of the twentieth century.⁹² The medium of painting changed from Varma's oil painting to water-based colors and the use of paper instead of canvas. The formats and sizes were also based on Mughal miniature painting rather than western easel painting. In short, the Bengal School synthesized the conventions of Ajanta cave paintings and Mughal miniature paintings with Japanese wash techniques rather than the realism of the European naturalism. The colors were subdued and cast shadows were absent. The adoption of the Japanese wash technique was another deliberate move to look to the eastern practices of the region not only to contribute to the nationalist philosophy but also to promote regionalism or more generally an "Eastern style."

Contrary to the revised wisdom that the school was traditional and conservative, the Bengal school art movement introduced a new form of modernism in art not only in the form of its formal aesthetics but also in its ideological conviction that defied western

⁹¹ For details see Mitter, *Art and Colonialism in Colonial India*, 208-14.

⁹² Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism And The Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 42, 50.

hegemony. It advocated and promoted Indian nationalism by claiming a special aesthetic disposition that was a reinterpretation of traditional Indian painting clearly in opposition to the western academic norms. The idea of an “Indian” aesthetic that was recovered and reconstructed from the past was pitted against the colonial education and detached traditions that produced modern Indian Art.⁹³ The works produced under the philosophy of Bengal School of Art were in sharp contrast to western art, and were products of an exclusive, nationalist ideology.

One example of Abanindranath Tagore’s work *Bharat Mata* (figure 1.3), produced in 1905, literally means Mother India. The image of the painting was a clear political move on behalf of Abanindranath Tagore to use the image of a Bengali woman in the form of a Hindu goddess. The female figure is rendered in washes with only a slight inclination towards naturalism. It is unlike Mughal miniature painting in which female faces were rendered, following certain aesthetic standards, such as big long almond shaped half closed eyes with sharp features. Abanindranath’s *Bharat Mata* (figure 1.3) clearly exemplifies the common face of a Bengali woman. Also like Ravi Varma, his goddess also has a humane character. The four symbolic objects she holds in her hand are not the typical conventional ones, but instead are emblems of modern-day life including food, knowledge, clothing and rosary (spiritual knowledge). The figure is centralized in the composition and framed within a frame, replicating the traditional Mughal miniature painting format. This amalgamation of various styles not only created a new style that was modern in its stylistic conventions but it also carried artist’s

⁹³ Thakurta, *The Making of a New Indian Art*, 5.

anticolonial voice, a modernist notion. Hence, the artwork becomes an active participant in the prevalent social fabric of anticolonial sentiments against British raj. The notion of modernism can be seen in agreement with cultural historian Tapati Guha-Thakurta who writes, “The dividing lines between ‘westernized’ and ‘nationalist’ painting between an imitative academic art and a creative Indian art were often more ideological than actual; they were consciously reared to sustain the ‘new wave’ and ‘nationalist’ identity of Abanindranath’s movement.”⁹⁴

Various scholars in the field of art history have identified *Bharat Mata* (figure 1.3), representing a shift in Indian nationalism to the Hindu nationalism, thus disinheriting other communities from the anti-colonial movement. The shift of Indian nationalism to the Hindu nationalism clearly created a feeling of unease and a visible rift between the Hindus and Muslims, the two majorities.⁹⁵ In response to this Hindu cultural nationalism, the outstanding Muslim artist Abdur Rahman Chughtai, who was working in Lahore at that time, developed his own style representing the awakening of the Muslim political and cultural identity, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Bengal School was both hybrid and modern, with a strong nationalist message that influenced the Indian subcontinent and produced several followers who spread the style and message throughout India. It must be noted here that the philosophy of the Bengal School was neither to revert to classical Indian art nor to replicate it, but to look back to the overall tradition of Indian painting that developed over centuries and

⁹⁴ Thakurta, *The Making of New Indian Art*, 6.

⁹⁵ Mitter. *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India: 1850-1922*, 235. Mitter, *Indian Art*, 180-1. Thakurta, *The Making of New Indian Art*, 195.

reinterpret it in a new and unique style. It was a hybrid of many aesthetic movements of Asia which according to Mitter, it captured the *Bhava* (feeling) of the artist.⁹⁶

Jamini Roy (1887-1972)

Jamini Roy was a Bengali painter and student of Abanindranath Tagore received his initial training in the academic tradition at the Calcutta Art School.⁹⁷ Roy later broke away from the naturalism of European academic painting and started to experiment with the folk painting styles of Kalighat and the Bengal *patua* tradition.⁹⁸ Roy reverted to a primitivist style of modern painting, using it as the particular Indian response of turning its back on colonial culture, which developed into his modern syntax. Mitter notes that, “Roy’s bold simplification and thick outlines applied with sweeping brush strokes exuded a crude vigor hitherto unknown in Indian art, his dull yellow and slate green figures and brick red background emulating the terracotta reliefs of his home village . . . show Roy’s conscious effort to identify with the folk painters.”⁹⁹

His work communicates freedom and even rebellion against tradition. For example, in *Blacksmith* (figure 1.4), a male figure monumentally prostrates himself in the middle of the picture frame holding a hammer in his hands. The composition is abruptly cut from all three sides except the bottom. The flat rendering of the frontally positioned male figure with a strong black outline suggests that all the details of the figure have not

⁹⁶ Mitter, *Indian Art*, 178.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 196.

⁹⁸ Dalmia. *The Making of Modern Indian Art*, 29.

⁹⁹ Partha Mitter. *The Triumph of Modernism*, 113.

been rendered in a classical European naturalism. The facial features shown in side profile are only place markers that are highly stylized and thus resonate with folk Bengali scroll paintings. The colors used in the painting are local, traditional organic pigments, typically warm Indian reds, and ochers. The combination of the colors, with the strong black outline, seems to echo stain glass painting of the Christian churches in Goa. The abstraction of the male figure and his abrupt cutting of the picture plane represents a remarkable modern approach. However, the subject matter of the painting *Blacksmith*, shown using both hands to pound his hammer, also contradicts the modern notion of the machine age. It is the depiction of a simple life at a very primitive stage. In addition to adapting the style of folk painting to his modern work, Roy also renounced artistic individualism in his artistic practice and thus converted his studio into a workshop where he worked with his son, nephew and number of traditional folk artists, as this was the way traditional folk painting were produced. He sought to make his workshops anonymous; deliberately subverting the “aura” of elitist painting is authenticity by producing collaborative works and refusing to sign them. This notion of team working enabled him to mass-produce his work cheaply for common people, without using the machines unlike Ravi Varma.¹⁰⁰ He used readily available local material and subverted the distinction between the individual and collaborative contributions in a work of art.¹⁰¹ Roy left a strong and lasting impact on generations of artists in the Indian subcontinent. His style of black outlines, abrupt cutting of compositions, flat treatment of two-

¹⁰⁰ Mitter argues that Roy’s objective of making the signature meaning less was his playful way of subverting of what Walter Benjamin calls ‘aura’ of a masterpiece. For detail see, Mitter, *Indian Art*, 196.

¹⁰¹ Mitter. *Triumph of Modernism*. 119.

dimensional space in the picture, and simplified rendering of objects and figures was followed by many subsequent artists. Mitter attests that Roy's work was the most radical expression of local identity in opposition to the Pan-Indian historicism of the Bengal School. He considers it "a political act."¹⁰²

While Abanindranath Tagore and Jamini Roy reverted to traditional Indian painting in order to invent a modern syntax, Rabindranath Tagore, who was a great Indian poet, educator, founder of Vishva Bharati University at Shantiniketan, and the first non-European to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1913, opposed the Bengal School and used primitivism for his artistic expression in a completely new way that was different from any other artist at that time.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

Rabindranath Tagore took up painting at the age of sixty-seven. Although he was initially in favor of the Bengal School (founded by his nephew Abanindranath Tagore), he later opposed it for being too rarefied. He also remained equidistant from the "modernism" of the West. In a lecture he delivered in Japan sometime between 1912-15 Rabindranath Tagore stated:

Modernism is not in the dress of the European, in the hideous structures, where their children are interned when they take lessons; or in the square houses with flat, straight wall surfaces, pierced with parallel lines of windows, where these people are caged in their life times; certainly modernism is not in their ladies' bonnets, carrying on them loads of incongruities. These are not modern but merely European. True modernism is freedom of mind, not slavery of taste. It is

¹⁰² The communist party of India urged Roy to declare himself as a "people's artist," but he refused to be involved in doctrinaire politics. Ibid., 119.

the independence of thought and action, not tutelage under European schoolmasters.¹⁰³

Rabindranath's statement above clearly shows his opinion about art practices, which was completely in defiance of colonialism. It might be another reason that he did not favor the Bengal School, which carried such a pronounced nationalist agenda. Rabindranath must have perceived it as a European implant because Europeans like E. B. Havell, Sister Nivedita, and others were behind this school of thought.

Rabindranath did not have any formal training in drawing or painting but his imagination and spiritual intellect was the driving force behind his work. Because he was not bound to any school, his works appear to be free of any specific style or convention that was Indian. His paintings are small scale, free spirited, bold and 'expressionist,' depicting simple distortions to convey his idea of truly modern art as "freedom of mind." *Laughing Face* (figure 1.5), is an ink portrait of a male figure, and fully expresses the laugh of a middle age man although the painting is very simple with a dark brown background in which only the brush strokes and tonal variations of brown create depth. Similarly, the portrait has only been rendered with a variation of diluted ink. The directional brush strokes define various portions of face and bust. For example, the bust below the neck has diagonal brush strokes and a texture has been created, making use of the color of the paper underneath. The neck above has slightly smoother ink washes. The hair has a longitudinal texture that is horizontal on the top and vertical along the length of the hair. This simplified painting is schematically modern even though it differs from

¹⁰³ Rabindranath Tagore. *Japan: A lecture by Rabindranath Tagore* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1916), 16-17.

anything that was practiced in the Indian tradition of the Bengal School or Jamini Roy's folk painting. Rather, his work represents his strong sense of formal design, spontaneity, ability to discard unnecessary details and a naïve automatic self-taught quality. There are no indicators of cultural ties in his work; neither is it in a trajectory of any prevalent western artist. His work was his own discovery. It seems to transcend time and location. Hence, the works of Rabindranath Tagore represent the radical definition of modernism that was rooted in the cultural context of India but did not bind it to Indian tradition; in fact, in that respect, it paralleled the modern art of the West.

Rabindranath Tagore was a well-known and respected figure in Germany because of his already established repute as a poet. In 1921, when Rabindranath visited the Bauhaus, he found a like-minded educational philosophy with Walter Gropius (1883-1969), Johannes Itten (1888-1967), and Georg Muche (1895-1987). On his suggestion, a selection of Bauhaus works were exhibited in Calcutta in December 1922, which included works by Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956), Johannes Itten (1889-1981), Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), Paul Klee (1879-1940), and Gerhard Marcks (1889-1981). It was one of the most important modern exhibitions of the time since it was the first Bauhaus exhibition in India, marking the formal arrival of "western" modern art in India. Another important aspect of this exhibition was that along with the modern European artists, Gaganendranath Tagore and Sunyani Devi (Rabindranath's nephew and niece) also exhibited their work.¹⁰⁴ Gaganendranath is considered as one of the first Indian

¹⁰⁴ Chaudhary, *Indian Modernism*, 943-44.

artists to respond to western cubism. However, Gaganendranath's work created quite a stir among the European art critics living in India.

Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938)

Gaganendranath Tagore the elder brother of Abanindranath Tagore, was the first Indian artist to engage with the western modern trend of cubism in the 1920s.¹⁰⁵ His earlier works were inspired by pen and brush paintings, learned from his visit to the Japanese painter, Yokoyama Taikan. Later Gaganendranath developed reputation for his brilliantly savage lithographs, caricaturing the social morals of colonial Bengal.¹⁰⁶ Being part of the 1922 exhibition of Bauhaus artists that was held in Calcutta, his work suddenly attracted a lot of attention but it was not necessarily all positive. It was hard for the colonial art critic to understand how an Indian artist can attempt to make art in a language that was not Indian. W.G. Archer (1907-1979) dismissed Gaganendranath work because it lacked the Indian-ness or the national mandate expected from an Indian artist. Archer considered his art to be a bad imitation of Picasso. For Archer, the use of the syntax of cubism, a product of the West, by an Indian artist immediately locked Gaganendranath into a dependent relationship—the colonized mimicking the superior art of the colonizer.¹⁰⁷ Gaganendranath's painting *Poet on the Island of Birds* (figure 1.6) shows an image of a fluttering bird-like image in bright colors as if rendered through a

¹⁰⁵ There is no information on how he came across cubism, probably print media.

¹⁰⁶ Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism*, 19.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

kaleidoscope. The title of painting enables one to assume that it is a portrait of artist's uncle Rabindranath Tagore, the famous poet. The painting depicts dazzling patterns, crisscrossing lights and shadows, and light refracting and reflecting, creating soft shapes and sub-shapes. The formal qualities of this work cannot be placed in any particular kind of cubism such as analytic or synthetic; instead, it represents a generalized type of cubism. Mitter notes that Gaganendranath looked for mechanical devices for intensifying color pattern. He was known to have held a crystal against a light to capture the rainbow colors. During his experimental studies of painting, he actually used a prism to study the effect of light passing through it and breaking up into bright hues and geometrical shapes. This was Gaganendranath's innovation of producing painting with a unique syntax, which gave a cubism-like effect. He himself admitted that cubism had simply enabled him to express himself better, with his new technique.¹⁰⁸ In his use of complete abstraction and fractured juxtaposition of multiple forms, Gaganendranath was closest to the cubist movement of the West.

While these various modern movements were taking place simultaneously in India, some of them were bringing the use of Indian aesthetics to promote Indian nationalism and anti-colonial resistance. Gaganendranath and Rabindranath's approach toward modern art as a freedom of expression was further endorsed by the Hungarian-born Indian artist Amrita Sher-Gil.

¹⁰⁸ Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism*, 23-24.

Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941)

Amrita Sher-Gil was a progressive modern artist, who did not believe in confining her art practice only to tradition. The daughter of a Sikh father and a Hungarian mother, she was trained at the Ecole-de-Beaux Arts in Paris. She returned to India at age twenty-two and identified her aspirations with India and its people. In her mixed heritage, she embodied the best of the both worlds. Her training in Paris, best equipped her with the painterly skills of the West, and later her introduction to Indian culture added to her artistic range. Amrita was convinced that it was pivotal for Indian artists to look back to the tradition of ancient Indian art but it was also important to be aware of the artistic practices of the West. She advocated that Indian artists should draw from eastern and western aesthetics as western artists had benefited and shaped the modern art of the West by looking into eastern artistic practices. She was critical of the Bengal School and stated:

Art should be reviewed in its international context; for it was the only way to enrich our national artWere our artists to seek inspiration from modern Western art just as the moderns discovered a new means of self-expression through the study of Eastern sculpture and painting, not only would they infuse new life into Indian painting but would help them really to understand the underlined principles of the ancient art of their own country.¹⁰⁹

Amrita herself tried to achieve the same balance in her work by bridging the gap between the western and eastern aesthetics. The subjects of her paintings are the lives and events of common people in rural India. According to the Indian painter Pran Nath Mago, “Amrita was greatly impressed and inspired by the traditional school of Indian painting,

¹⁰⁹ Pran Nath Mago, *Contemporary Art in India: A Perspective* (India: National Book Trust, 2001), 63.

such as Ajanta and Rajput and Mughal Miniatures. She, however developed her own style which, though not necessarily Indian in the traditional sense of the world, was ‘fundamentally Indian in Spirit.’”¹¹⁰

Her painting technique is bold and sumptuous, a two-dimensional primitivist. Her unique style is a combination of impressionist, post-impressionist, and flat style reminiscent of Gauguin, while embodying the powerful influence of the ancient Buddhist paintings of Ajanta caves.¹¹¹ *The Brahmachari* (figure 1.7) is one such example of her synthesized aspects from the East and the West. The five young Brahmin followers are the focus of the painting. Four of the five figures are sitting in a semicircular manner close to each other not conversing, but absorbed in thought. One of the figures on the left side of the painting is looking back at the viewer, while the figure next to him appears to be a child who has turned away from the viewer and facing the flat wall in the back. The central figure is taller and lighter in color compared to the other four, his left hand is placed on his chest, and the other hand is touching the earth replicating Buddha’s earth-touching posture, calling mother earth to witness the moments of enlightenment. The two figures next to him are in deep thought, oblivious to the viewer. Given the fact that Amrita was trained in Paris and her earlier work showed her mastery of naturalistic painting, it seems in this painting she is unlearning the skill of naturalistic rendering. She deliberately strived towards the sophistication of traditional Indian painting, and in one of her statements, she claimed affinities with the indigenous tradition and noted; “Europe

¹¹⁰ Mago, *Contemporary Art in India*, 39.

¹¹¹ Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism*, 55.

belongs to Picasso, Matisse, Braque and many others, India belongs only to me.”¹¹² Her statement also shows that she understood and accepted the differences between the two traditions. Although she was trained in a Parisian school, she chose to associate herself with India. Her rendering of the limbs in *The Brahmachari* (figure 1.7), especially hands, are somewhat abstracted. The body type of figures is South Indian, with slightly elongated torso and limbs. The faces of the figures are tilted up with a three-quarters view, and the skin of the figures is dark, in a way that it reminds one of the figures of Ajanta cave paintings.¹¹³ Amrita was considered a painter of melancholy rural India. In 1941, she moved to Lahore, a bustling city of knowledge and artistic happenings and set up her studio in her apartment on Mall Road in Lahore.¹¹⁴ However, she died within a few months of her arrival in Lahore, even before she could settle there.

Lahore, a Western Punjab of colonial India (now Pakistan), because of its geographical location and rich history was like Calcutta one of the subcontinent’s center of art, culture and literature. After the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, it became the artistic capital of Pakistan. Because the Mayo School of Arts was located in Lahore, it attracted many artists from India. For example Samanendranath Gupta (1913-1959), a student of Abanindranath Tagore was teaching at the Mayo School. Babesh Chandra Sanyal (1901-2003) was another modern artist who also had his own studio on the

¹¹² Yashodhara Dalmia, Amrita Sher-Gil: A Life, (India: Penguin, 2013), Preface, XVII.

¹¹³ Sher-Gil visited all Ajanta cave paintings on her return to India and it was a life changing experience for her artistic career.

¹¹⁴ Sher-Gil lived on the famous Mall road Lahore where The Pak Tea House (then known as India Tea House) and the Coffee House were located.

famous Mall Road in Lahore. Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1899-1975), a prolific Muslim artist, a native of Lahore, was born and raised in a multi-generational family of architects, engineers, painters, and decorators. He was already a well-established, prominent artist working in the mainstream of Indian art before the Partition.¹¹⁵ His modern work a quintessential marker of Muslim nationalism, which was a reaction to Abanindranath Tagore's Hindu nationalism (discussed earlier in this chapter). Chughtai was considered the most important artist for Pakistan after its establishment because he became the bridge between the colonial and postcolonial times as well as an active participant who witnessed the transition of Indian nationalism being divided into Hindu and Muslim nationalisms.

Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1899- 1975)

Abdur Rahman Chughtai a Neo-Orientalist painter received his formal training at the Mayo School of Arts in 1914 and also taught at this school in the photo-lithography department from 1916-1924.¹¹⁶ Stylistically, Chughtai's large-scale Mughal-Persian watercolor paintings were very close to the Bengal School of Art. Many Indian scholars

¹¹⁵ See Appasamy, *Abinandranth Tagore and the Art of his Time 1918-1984*; Ratan Parimoo, *Studies in Modern Indian Art* (New Delhi, India: Kanak Publishers, 1975); and Mitter, *Art and Colonialism in Colonial India 1850-1922*.

¹¹⁶ Marcela Sirhandi, "Abdur Rehman Chughtai: A modern South Asian Artist", Ph.D. Thesis dissertation, (Oklahoma University, 1984), 38- 43.

have debated this claim, however, the artist himself strictly denies being part of the Bengal School.¹¹⁷

In his earlier paintings, Chughtai employed Hindu religious themes such as *Arjun the Victor* (figure 1.8). This watercolor on paper represents Arjun, a protagonist from the *Mahabharata*. He is the victor of hundred battles and Son of God, Indra. The scene in particular references the victory of Arjun and his return home to celebrations held in honor of his victories. As Arjun is a character of a victor, he is placed in the middle of the composition, standing tall and victorious. In the background a number of people including men and women had gathered; none of them, however, appears to be engaging with Arjun. Stylistically the painting is a synthesis of Indian Mughal miniature painting. The use of color in this painting is muted, but typical of the reds and ochers of the Indian color palettes of Mughal miniature painting. The features are stylized, and the use of rhythmical curvilinear is his signature style. The details in the various types of headdresses and jewelry of audience members behind Arjun resonate to the characteristic detailing of miniature painting. The flat, painted background makes no reference to any space and time. *Arjun the Victor* (figure 1.8) is only one example of Chughtai's earlier work that references a Hindu Mythological scene, but Chughtai painted many such

¹¹⁷ See details Ratan Parimoo, also argues that Chughtai was Abanindranth's student in his book, *Studies in Modern Indian Art*, 19. But in fact there is no evidence to support such a claim. However, Samanendranath Gupta was Abanindranath Tagore's student and he later taught at Mayo School of Art. Gupta was also the principal of the Mayo School of Arts from 1929-42. The possibility is that Chughtai might have studied under Samanendranath Gupta. The art historian Jaya Appasamy in her book *Abanindranath Tagore and the Art of his Time* argues that Abdur Rahman Chughtai was one of the outstanding Muslim painters of the Bengal School (see page 68). It is a debate that Marcella Sirhandi has discussed in detail in her Ph.D. Thesis dissertation, "Abdur Rahman Chughtai: A modern South Asian Artist," 40-49.

subjects, which are mostly in the collections of Indian Museums.¹¹⁸ But later on, with the *swadeshi* movement (oriented towards Hindu nationalism) being the driving force of Hindu nationalism, there were shifts in attitudes in colonial India. As mentioned earlier, the Muslims were uncomfortable with the rise of Hindu nationalism. Chughtai was also affected by these changes and he responded to the *swadeshi* movement and his work reflects a clear shift towards Islamic tradition. He started to create paintings with references to the nostalgia of the glorious pre-colonial past of the Muslim Mughal rulers.

Partha Mitter notes:

The *swadeshi* ideology of art, a reflection of militant Hindu nationalism, tended to privilege Hindu culture as the kernel of the Indian nation, thereby disinheriting other communities. Such development created a feeling of unease among the Muslims. Abdur Rahman Chughtai, an outstanding Muslim painter from Lahore, represents the awakening of Muslim political and cultural identity in India partly in response to Hindu cultural nationalism.¹¹⁹

Besides the Muslim nationalistic drive, it is also possible that Chughtai changed his style because the patronage of art that was previously predominantly Hindu also changed hands with the pronounced Hindu nationalism. It is also possible that, by the 1920s, Chughtai was also greatly influenced by the great poet Allama Iqbal (1877-1938), who is famously acknowledged in Pakistan as the first dreamer of a separate homeland for Muslims. Influenced by Iqbal's pan-Islamic ideas, Chughtai began to reorient his paintings towards a consciously Islamic and Mughal aesthetic and identity. His later paintings are carefully set in elaborate arabesque interiors, with the male and female

¹¹⁸ For further detail see, Sirhandi, "Abdur Rahman Chughtai: A Modern South Asian Artist."

¹¹⁹ Mitter, *Art and Colonialism in Colonial India 1850-1922*, 267.

figures covered in elaborate, stylized layers of clothing, as seen in *Jahan Ara and Taj* (figure 1.9). However, one cannot ignore the formal and thematic overlap between the work of Chughtai and Abanindranath Tagore. *Jahan Ara and Taj* by Chughtai (figure 1.9) and *The Last Days Shah Jahan* by Abanindranath (figure 1.10) Tagore share several commonalities, yet nuances seem to occur naturally because of the regionalism and other prevalent factors, including nationalism and religion as dominant themes. These works can be used for a detailed analysis to observe the similarity of the two artists subject matter and styles. The two images depict much more than the holistic agenda of Indian nationalism in the case of Tagore's Bengal art movement and the nostalgia and longing for Muslim glory in case of Chughtai's Punjab painting school.

Abanindranath's 1901 painting entitled *The Last Days of Shah Jahan* (figure 1.10) was exhibited at the Delhi *Darbar* in 1903 on the coronation of Edward VII as an emperor of India. The painting was awarded a silver medal. This award gave a prestige to Abanindranath in India as well as in Great Britain. On analyzing the image, one finds that the stylistic features of the painting show a strong inclination towards the Mughal miniature painting, which typically comprised characteristics such as a hand-held, small scale painting; a frame within a frame to create a border around the painting; use of watercolors on *wasli* paper; very fine brush techniques; and multiple perspectives and flatness of two-dimensionality. The size and the format of *The Last Days of Shah Jahan* (figure 1.10) are the same as a typical Mughal miniature. The border is absent in this piece, but the architectural structure has been used to frame the dying Shah Jahan with his daughter Jahan Ara at his feet. The architecture displays intricate arabesque and floral

decorations that are prominent characteristics of Mughal miniature painting. Just as in a typical miniature painting, there is neither the illusion of space nor any cast shadows in the painting. There is no depth of space, but the viewer's eye is taken beyond the dying king to a distant view of the Taj Mahal. The full moon peeking through the clouds in the background endows this atmospheric painting with a romantic sadness. The subtle gradation of color in the foreground and in the background seems to be carefully measured and controlled, contributing to the delicate composition of the image

Does the subject matter of this painting bespeak of Indian nationalism? Is it the title, or the reference to the Taj Mahal? The image and title refer to the great Mughal king Shah Jahan (1592-1666) in his last days. The dying king reclines in the foreground, gazing at the distant view of the Taj Mahal, his legacy that became the symbol of India. The image seems to be allegorically lamenting the fall of the Mughal Empire, as it was the last one before the British Raj. Indian art historian, Debashish Banerji, although implies that Abanindranath Tagore was not promoting Hindu nationalism in *Bharat Mata* (figure 1.3), it must be noted that it is a later work than *The Last Days of Shah Jahan* (figure 1.10). Banerji contends, "If this image [figure 1.3] is to be taken as carrier of nationalism, it must be acknowledged that Tagore's location of the nationalism was not restricted to the Hindu past, but in some ways included Islam."¹²⁰ This is in reference to the clear religious divide that started to become evident at the time when the province of Bengal was divided into two regions in 1905. Many disadvantaged Muslims in East Bengal welcomed the colonial partition of Bengal as a way to secure opportunities, but

¹²⁰ Debashish Banerji. *The Alternate Nation of Abanindranath Tagore*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010), 32.

this pursuit inflamed Indian nationalist sentiments, especially in the more educated and modern West Bengal.¹²¹ At the same time, the Taj Mahal, as one of the Seven Wonders of the World, was the perfect emblem of the orient for western imaginations. Tagore's use of the Taj Mahal in conjunction with the dying king might also refer to the passing of time and mortality, hence the beginning of a new era, probably a modern one. One might also interpret the work as suggesting that if three hundred years of Mughal reign can end, so could the British Raj.

Chughtai's Mughal and Persian literary themes for his painting can also be understood as a form of resistance both to colonialism as well as to Hindu dominance. Mitter states that "Chughtai's painting entitled, *Jahan Ara and Taj* (figure 1.9) is modeled on Tagore's *The Passing of Shah Jahan* (figure 1.10) to underline the strength of this influence."¹²² No doubt both paintings are close in composition, but Chughtai distinctly deploys more Islamic traditions. The painting captures the moment right after the death of Shah Jahan, as Jahan Ara is collapsed on Shah Jahan's bed, mourning his death. In one sense it can be regarded as a continuation of a narrative initiated by Tagore. In Chughtai's painting, the absence of the Taj Mahal and Shah Jahan, and the presence of Jahan Ara, capture the moment of "the present," perhaps alluding to the idea that the glorious past of the Muslims is over, but the present is going to bring the Muslim glory back through the younger generation of Mughals.

In stylistic features, Chughtai's figure is the most prominent part of the

¹²¹ Dadi, *Modernism And The Art of Muslim South Asia*, 51.

¹²² Mitter, *Art and Colonialism in Colonial India 1850-1922*, 272.

composition. The figure/ground relationship in his work is very different from Tagore's. The female protagonist in his painting is not realistic or idealized but romanticized. Her facial features are exaggerated to create Chughtai's romanticized version of a beautiful lady, hence, it is a character type with beautiful half-closed, dreamy eyes—similar to Ajanta cave paintings and far from naturalism. The figure is enveloped in layers of clothes, almost giving the body a feeling of floating in the atmosphere. The overly covered feature of the female body with no suggestion of a bodily form is distinctly in the Muslim tradition typical of Persian Mughal miniature painting. Pakistani art historian Akbar Naqvi celebrates the individuality of Chughtai's address of Muslim identity in his work. He writes:

It was Abdur Rahman Chughtai, and his reconstruction of the classical artistic tradition of Muslim India under new conditions that put him on the national map . . . It was he who stood up as the Muslim answer to Abanindranath Tagore. He looked not to Paris, nor did he delve into the unconscious. The sap of his art came from his nostalgia for the eroding culture of his ancestors.¹²³

Chughtai was well versed in Urdu and Persian literature, and over the years became increasingly interested in Persian-Mughal poetry and painting. Besides painting various subjects, he wrote poetry, short stories, and essays about his own work. He maintained that his work was a distinct re-visitation of Mughal-Persian aesthetics. Most prominently he is known for his work of Omar Khayyam and Allama Iqbal.¹²⁴ At the time of the Partition, Chughtai was over 48 years old and his work became a symbol of Pakistani national art.

¹²³ Akbar Naqvi, *Image and Identity* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8.

¹²⁴ Allama Iqbal, (1877-1938) great poet known as the poet of the East, is considered as the first dreamer of a separate homeland for Muslims.

The above-mentioned artists and various movements in colonial India represent various attempts from within and outside of India in order to invent the individual modern and Indian modern expressions. Sometimes art is used as a tool against colonialism and a means for projecting nationalism as seen in the Bengal School, and Jamini Roy's work, and sometimes it focuses on issues of identity (as in Abdur Rahman Chughtai's work). Other times individual voices of such artists as Amrita Sher-Gil, Gaganendranath Tagore, and Rabindranath Tagore wish to make their work to become part of the international discourse on modern art. Indian art historian Yashodhara Dalmia explains that by the mid 1940s, as the issue of dividing colonial India accelerated in pace, the artists of the Indian subcontinent were facing the dual challenges of how to align their art with the international modernism that had seeped into India through books and print media, and how to formulate an Indian identity in terms of their own historical and aesthetical past.¹²⁵ On the historic evening of the Partition, six artists from different religious backgrounds and social classes came together in Bombay to form a formal art group called as Progressive Artists' Group or (PAG) also known as Bombay Progressives. The artists felt that the formation of PAG was pivotal at that moment because the country was being divided into two and it was, therefore, important to make two statements. One was that all these artists presented a "secular India," as they all belonged to different faiths, and their coming together was a declaration that the divide of colonial India on the basis of religion was unfair. Their other approach emphasized the country's freedom from colonialism, and consequent freedom to express historical and religious differences.

¹²⁵ Dalmia. *The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives*, 37.

Progress Art Group (PAG) 1947-1949

To continue the narrative of modern art of India, PAG is briefly introduced here; however, a more detailed account of PAG will be given later in Chapter 2. PAG was the first artist group that included artists: Krishnaji Howlaji Ara (1914-1985), Sadanand K. Bakre (1920-2007), Hari Ambadas Gade (1917-2001), Maqbool Fidda Husain (1915-2011), Syed Haider Raza (1922), and Francis Newton Souza (1924 – 2002). PAG was united not by style, medium, or aesthetic principles, but by a goal of artistic "freedom."¹²⁶

While the group experimented and tried to grapple with international modernist styles by incorporating imagery drawn from local, religious, and historical traditions, it aimed not only to launch itself as a group of post-colonial, modern artists but also, more importantly, to establish Indian art as a secular one in the international art scene.

1.3 Precursor to Modernism in the Indian Subcontinent

This far the chapter with its brief descriptions and analyses of selected artists, has tried to account for the multiple modern art developments in Indian art that emerged in the early 20th century often parallel to the political and social conditions of colonial India. The colonial interventions in the mid-eighteenth century brought European academic naturalistic painting to India, which was initially synthesized by the Indian court painters in order to cope with their deteriorating economic situation and the new rulers by

¹²⁶ Beth Citron, "Contemporary Art in Bombay, 1965-95" (PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 8.

inventing company painting. This genre of painting was modern in its ability to help artists to break from the traditional school of miniature painting and provided an opportunity to explore a new way of artistic expression enabling them to earn their livelihood through their artistic skills.

Ravi Varma embraced the formal technique of European academic painting to mimic the colonizer and in doing so he invented a modern artistic language that was grounded in the Indian subcontinent in its content. Ravi Varma brought down his high-art painting, to the common people by introducing oleographs first time in India. His work was modern in many respects, including his ability to break away not only from traditional medium and style but also from the conventional iconic, ideologic, and symbolic depiction of gods and goddesses by painting them naturalistically, thereby, bringing them down to a human level. The rise of the Bengal School was a response to European academic painting; affiliated artists projected Indian miniature painting in an innovative way by synthesizing it with the Japanese wash technique. The Bengal School movement gained popularity and dominated the Indian subcontinent because it was promoted as a nationalist and anti-colonial movement. Modern aspects not only included the stylistic convention of Indian hybridity, Japanese washes and the linearity of art Nouveau, but also this art communicated artists' feelings of anti-colonialism. Later, the Bengal School became the emblem of Hindu nationalism due to its promotion of Hindu iconography. Rabindranath Tagore's painting differed from anything that had been practiced in India; It was abstract and full of expression; It was not looking back to Indian tradition in its stylistic convention at all but was the individual voice of the artist and can

be considered as a modernism parallel to the abstract art movement of the West. The Neo-Orientalist paintings of Abdur Rahman Chughtai, although close in style to the Bengal School, addressed the nostalgia of the Mughal Empire and celebrated the Mughal-Persian Islamic identity. PAG at the cusp of partition emerged as the modernist artist group invested in promoting art as the celebration of freedom. Therefore, it can be conclusively argued that the fine arts in British India were actively engaged in the ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity.

Fine artists were also active participants in the nationalist politics of that time. Art was used to deter colonialism and also as the emblem of the struggle for independence. In colonial India, there was a constant back-and-forth tension between the western and eastern painting traditions. Sometimes these traditions were modified to compete with the prevalent trends of the West and, at other times upheld, as a resistance to colonialism and construction of nationalism. In these artistic trends were the precursors of mid-20th-century modernism were imperatively tied to the history of Pakistani art; unfortunately this approach generally has been ignored in Pakistani art historical scholarship. Pakistani art historians tend to begin this country's history in 1947, thus creating the myth that Pakistani art sprang up without any context or history.¹²⁷ However, the modern and contemporary art of Pakistan cannot be analyzed in isolation but must be contextualized through an understanding of its pre-partition modern movements in India.

¹²⁷ K. K Aziz, *The Making of Pakistan: A Study in Nationalism* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2013). K. K. Aziz *The Murder of History: A Critique of History Textbooks used in Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2012). In general textbooks in Pakistani schools (K-12) generally promote biased historical accounts.

1.4 Partition of Colonial India and Establishment of Pakistan

The introduction already discussed the political conditions of colonial India that not only initiated the anticolonial movement against the British Raj, but also sparked the movement for a separate land for Indian Muslims.

Background of Partition

The Partition of 1947 was a watershed moment that not only ended colonialism but also divided the country into two irreversible geographical, political, social, economic, and cultural spaces. The aftermath of the division was devastating because of the massive bloodshed that resulted from migrations across the borders. This section will briefly discuss the genocide and displacement of masses of people, rupture in the history of the Indian subcontinent, and its impact on the visual arts of the newly founded Islamic state of Pakistan within the larger post-colonial context.

The establishment of Pakistan became a reality within seven-and-a-half years of its proposition by the All India Muslim League (also known as Muslim League).¹²⁸ As discussed earlier, the partition of Bengal in 1905 was the precursor to the Partition of 1947, dividing the Indian subcontinent into Hindu India and the Islamic republic of Pakistan. On August 14, 1947, Pakistan came into being when the British Raj failed to negotiate a power-sharing formula between the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. Pakistan was established on the basis of the two-nation theory.

¹²⁸ The All India Muslim League was a political party established in 1906 at a meeting of Muslim leaders in Dacca. The goal of the political party was to safeguard and advance the civil rights of Indian Muslims, in a predominantly Hindu country. Quaid Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan joined the Muslim League in 1913.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/jinnah_mohammad_ali.shtml
(accessed on Dec 15, 2015).

Muslim League's executive decision of demanding an independent state for Muslims on the basis of religion is debatable and has been a subject of study for many history scholars.¹²⁹ Ishtiaq Ahmed, professor emeritus of Political Science at Stockholm University points out, "The All India Muslim League invoked Islam to mobilize all sections of Muslim society while cleverly ignoring the sectarian and doctrinal differences and using the religion as common culture and identity."¹³⁰

In her pivotal work, *The Sole Spokesman*, scholar, and professor of history Ayesha Jalal contests the idea of a two-nation theory and holds Britain responsible for creating the rift between Hindus and Muslims. She writes:

The political map of Indian subcontinent did not reflect the stark religious affiliation of its peoples when Britain colonized the Indian subcontinent, but by 1947, as the British Raj ended- the power was transferred to two dominions, the frontiers of the new states were drawn along the lines of religion.¹³¹

Due to its geographical location, the Indian subcontinent has always been a multicultural society with strong caste and class systems. Therefore, the presence of Muslims appeared to be another caste. However, politically British Raj was responsible in creating the rift between the Hindus and Muslims by initiating the division of Bengal in 1905, which actually became the precedent of Partition. Islam is divided into many sects, each slightly different from the other in its doctrines, so it is difficult to paint all

¹²⁹ For detail study see Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), *The Struggle for Pakistan: a Muslim homeland and global politics* (Cambridge: Belknap Press 2014). Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Concept of Islamic state; An Analysis of the Ideological Controversy in Pakistan* London: Francis Pinters Publishers, 1987).

¹³⁰ Ahmed. "Pakistan's National Identity," 49.

¹³¹ Jalal. *The Sole Spokesman*, 5.

Muslims with the one broad brush of Islam.¹³² However, the political environment rapidly changed in colonial India with Indian nationalism converting into Hindu and Muslim nationalisms, due to a handful of politicians in the Muslim League who wanted to benefit from this situation. Ahmed summarizes what the establishment of Pakistan entailed for different social classes in a broader perspective of Muslim Nation:

Pakistan meant different things to different people. To the landlords it meant continued leadership; to the doctrinal-minded Muslims, a unique opportunity to create an Islamic state in the light of their ideas; to the Muslim intelligentsia and the poorer classes, a state where social and economic justice would prevail and their dignity established, according to Iqbalite teachings; to the peasants, freedom from the yoke of the Hindu money-lender; to the regional leaders, a greater autonomy than was expected in a united India dominated by Congress; to the Muslim bourgeoisie, the necessary environment where they could develop their potential...; and to bureaucrats and the military, an excellent opportunity to secure quick promotions; and to the military establishment it brought a central role in a country where the civilian political process was dependent from the very beginning upon its support and active participation.¹³³

At the time of its establishment, Pakistan was geographically split into two wings: West and East Pakistan. Both wings were separated with India in between, meaning the West and the East Pakistan did not exist together physically. Overall Pakistan was divided into five provinces: Western Punjab, Sind, North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Baluchistan, and Eastern Bengal (also known as East Pakistan and today's Bangladesh).¹³⁴ As a result of this partition, millions of people, Hindu, Muslim and Sikhs migrated across borders, a majority of them ending the unprecedented bloodshed, looting,

¹³² For example in present day, Pakistan is facing severe sectarian conflicts between Shia, Sunni and Ahmadi sects. In fact, the Ahmadi have been declared as non-Muslims.

¹³³ Ahmed, *The Concept of Islamic State*, 80-1.

¹³⁴ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 1-2.

and rapes, such was the state of hatred that was provoked in the last seven years of struggle for freedom. Along with the land, this historical division included the ruling powers, government, private institutions, financial wealth, and the hearts and minds of people. As India strived to establish itself as a secular country, Pakistan struggled to found itself as an independent, Islamic Republic because it was established on the basis of a two-nation theory. Vazira Zamindar, a historian of modern South Asia, notes that despite the administrative and territorial division that accompanied Partition, much was left unresolved during the making of two nation-states.¹³⁵ She further points out that “[t]he rupture of 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent is presented as a simplistic convenient end-date and bifurcation of distinct nation-states, as if two fully-formed nation-states emerged at once in the aftermath of Partition.”¹³⁶

1.5 The Selective History of Pakistan and its Redefining of New Identity and Nationalism

Political Backdrop for the Modern Art of Pakistan

After the establishment of Pakistan, its government rigorously focused on constructing new government institutions as well as restructuring existing ones. The process encompassed the reorganizing of cities, reallocation of properties, refugees, and reformulation of the educational system and industrial infrastructure. It was a time of anticipation and flux in the history of the newly formed country. In this restructuring

¹³⁵ Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 3.

¹³⁶ Vazira Zamindar, *Divided Families and the Making of Nationhood in India and Pakistan 1947-65* (Ph.D. diss. Columbia University, NY, 2003), 3.

phase, the government of Pakistan began to construct a highly selective history, which deliberately focused on shedding thousands of years of shared history with India in order to establish itself as a newly formed Islamic nation with an identity distinct from India.¹³⁷

To analyze the construction of this unique identity and the nationalism that the post-independent Pakistani strived to implant, one first needs to understand and situate the ideal nation-state that the Pakistani leaders intended when it was established. Although there are no absolute or objective criteria on which nationalism in general, or state nationalism in particular, can be grounded. Language, religion, common ethnic origin, historical experience, cultural heritage, civilization, common residence in the same region and other such factors have been invoked repeatedly as determining characteristics of the national identity.¹³⁸ As an ideology and political doctrine, nationalism, in general, is understood as a claim set forth on behalf of a body of people demanding to establish a sovereign state over a specific territory. Once that state comes into being, it has to devise a national identity in order to distinguish itself from neighboring governments. In the case of new or recently established post-colonial states, the construction of a cohesive national identity is imperative. As discussed in the introduction, Renan's idea of nationalism is to be found in the mutual sharing of a past and the sacrifices that community members make. In his words:

¹³⁷ See the introduction in reference to the discussion of "Objectives resolution," which was presented to the first assembly of Pakistan for the construction of first constitution of Pakistan based on Islamic laws.

¹³⁸ Ahmed, "Pakistan National Identity," 47.

Man is a slave neither of his race nor his language, nor of his religion, nor of the course of rivers nor of the direction taken by mountain chains. A large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart, creates the kind of moral conscience, which we call a nation. So long as this moral consciousness gives proof of its strength by the sacrifices, which demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community, it is legitimate and has the right to exist.¹³⁹

However, Anderson considers nationhood as a mental affinity and nationalism as “an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”¹⁴⁰

The fact that nationalists are able to imagine boundaries suggests that they recognize the existence of partition by culture, ethnicity and social structure among mankind.¹⁴¹ In the case of Pakistan, religion was used as a unifying agent, and the nuances that were involved in even one religion were completely ignored, as Ahmed has pointed out earlier.

In light of Renan’s and Anderson’s definition of nation or nationalism, Pakistan ironically does not fit into neither one. Pakistan could not even sustain the rhetoric of an Islamic state. Soon after its establishment, East Pakistan (today, Bangladesh) started to drift away from West Pakistan. Although there were many political factors involved (besides the fact that the two wings of Pakistan East and West had no geographical attachment), the implementation of Urdu as an official language of Pakistan became a bone of contention that eventually led to the Partition of Pakistan in 1971, resulting in the formation of East Pakistan as Bangladesh.

¹³⁹ Renan concludes: Now, the essence of a nation is that the people have many things in common, but have also forgotten much together. Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” text from a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11, 1882. (translated by Ethan Rundell)

¹⁴⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 3-7.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

Sociologist Rogers Brubaker classifies nationalism as well as state-nationalism as being based on two analytic types: the civil-political French idea and cultural/ethnic German idea of nationalism. In French nationalism, a country is conceived in relation to the institutional and territorial frame of the state. It is political and linked to the idea of abstract citizenship. The German idea of nation-state entails an organic culture, linguistics, or racial community. On this understanding nationhood is ethnocultural, and not a political fact.¹⁴² Using both Brubaker's Germanic and French model of state-nationalism, Ahmed defines the complex nationalism at the core of establishment of Pakistan. He opines:

[T]he founder of Pakistan Mohammad Ali Jinnah, first used religion to justify the claim to separate statehood for the 'Muslim Nation' of India, but then tried to project a vision of inclusive Pakistani nationalism that would grant equal rights to all individuals in Pakistani population in accordance with the French model of territorial nationalism.¹⁴³

The ambivalent ideology in which the land was claimed for Muslims but then also projected to include all communities clearly represents the immense confusion between the conflicting ideologies that were the basis of establishing of Pakistan, which continues to cause more confusion in the construction of Pakistani identity even today.

Over time, it has become more evident that the country's founder and the first president of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah believed, "Pakistani nationalism would grant equal rights to all individuals in Pakistani population in accordance with the French

¹⁴² Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1-2.

¹⁴³ Ahmed, "Pakistan National Identity," 48.

model of territorial nationalism.”¹⁴⁴ However, the Muslim population of Pakistan to date has no tolerance whatsoever to include the minority communities as Pakistani nationals. The unfair implication of blasphemy law and the act of destroying many Hindu temples in Pakistan are examples of this intolerance. The idea of nationalism and construction of a new Islamic identity separate from the previously shared one with India is problematic as there was no established agenda as examples for the people of Pakistan to follow. Even Jinnah never clearly laid out a plan for Pakistan after its establishment.¹⁴⁵ What becomes apparent is the omnipresent confusion in the construction of a Pakistani identity because of the new nations’ need to grapple with its religious mandate and, its sectarian divisions. In its struggle to rid itself of centuries-old historical and cultural ties, Pakistan tried to align itself with the Arab culture, again on the basis of religion. However, because there was no mutual tradition of sharing art, culture, and literature, this alignment with Arab cultures and the Middle East was and still is artificial. In addition, Islam as it is practiced in Pakistan is very different from that practiced in Saudi Arabia or other countries and tribes in northern Africa. Given that religions are influenced by the cultures, prior to the Partition, Pakistan shared the eclectic culture of Indian subcontinent; therefore, even the Islamic practices in Pakistan are very much influenced by the Indian culture. Hence, although the practice of Islam in most parts of Pakistan is more liberal, there are certain factions of society inclined toward Arabian lands. This difference of variable practices of Islam continues to be an issue of the present.

¹⁴⁴ I am here referring to one of Roger Brubaker’s civil-political French idea.

¹⁴⁵ This leads to another interesting debate that can be addressed another times.

1.6 Art of Pakistan (West and East Pakistan: 1947-1952)

This section will first elaborate on the importance of the city of Lahore, which was the heart of artistic activity in Pakistan, even before its formal establishment and will identify the rarity of visual artistic responses to the historic Partition verses the many reflections on the event by literary circles. Then it will proceed to discuss the Mayo School of Art and the University of Punjab, two very important institutions that played a pivotal role in promoting the visual arts in Pakistan. Later, it focuses on a general description of prevalent trends in the fine arts of Pakistan after its establishment, by considering the medium of painting since sculpture was never established as an art form, largely due to the limited definition of sculpture, which was restricted to the human form. In an Islamic state, it is considered un-Islamic to make idols, and sculpture fell under this preview.

The following discussion will emphasize developing trends, and only a few selected artists will be discussed in this context, as they were responsible for major changes in art trends in the first decade of Pakistan's establishment. This emphasis will provide a birds-eye view of the artistic practices of pre-partition artists, including where and what kind of works were being produced since some artists migrated from India to Pakistan, others were already situated in the area that became known as Pakistan. Some of the artists were to develop a new improvised artistic language geared towards promoting art that supported nationalism and highlighted its Islamic character. While other artists continued with their preexistent practices based on European academic

painting, and still some others struggled to move completely away from the two existent styles—Mughal-Persian and European naturalism.

Lahore: Artistic Capital of Pakistan

Because of its geographical location and rich history, Lahore had been a center of artistic and cultural activities in West Pakistan for centuries. Lahore houses some of the most beautiful Mughal architectures, including the Badshahi Mosque, Shalimar Garden, the mausoleum of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, and the Lahore Fort.¹⁴⁶ The presence of these monuments indicates that Lahore was an all-time favorite for many kings, Emperors of Mughal Empire and ambitious and thoughtful individuals even before India was colonized. Because of its geographical location (North-Eastern border of Pakistan), the largest city of Punjab province and its history as the center of cultural activities, it is an artistic and intellectual hub even today. A famous local Punjabi phrase, *Jin nay Lahore Nahi Vekhya, o jamia hi Nahi*, (One who has not seen Lahore, is not yet born) emphasizes the city's importance.

Since the 1920s, the largest numbers of Urdu literary journals, newspapers, and books, as well as two of the best English-language dailies have been published from Lahore.¹⁴⁷ Even today, the city generates eight percent of publications of Pakistan. It has been the home to the intellectual elites of Pakistan. Several institutions including the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), Government College Lahore, Dayal Singh

¹⁴⁶ The monuments have a rich and complex history, which can be discussed another time as it outside the scope of this dissertation.

¹⁴⁷ K. K. Aziz, *The Coffee House of Lahore: A Memoir 1942-57* (Lahore: Sang-e Meel, 2008), 5.

College and Oriental College Lahore have all been considered best representations of modern, Western education, which has added to Lahore's vibrant culture. The city houses two important meeting places for the artists, writers and poets; Coffee House and Pak Tea House (within walking distance from Mayo School of Art), located on Mall road. Coffee House has been the artists' meeting place for informal, yet meaningful discussions about the visual arts, while Pak Tea House has been the center of activities for Lahore's justly famous literary circle of such prominent writers, and poets as Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984), Intizar Husain (1923-2016), Abdullah Hussain (1931-2015), Hafeez Jalandhari (1900-1982), Sadaat Hassan Manto (1912-1955), and Noon Meem Rashid (1910-1975), who would gather there in the evening. These writers were revolutionary in introducing modernism to Urdu literature. Evenings at these places were delightful with the cheering and lively debates amongst writers, actors, artists, poets, and lawyers who were engaged in conversations focusing on liberal arts, politics, and other prevalent issues surrounding the newly formed country.

Lack of Artistic Response to the Historic Partition in Visual Arts of Pakistan

The studies of Urdu literature in Pakistan after the Partition of 1947 demonstrated that prominent writers and poets like Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Intizar Husain, Abdullah Hussain, Sadaat Hassan Manto, and others contributed significant scholarship to the discourse of the Partition.¹⁴⁸ However, there seems to be a lack of such reflection in the visual arts,

¹⁴⁸ Manto's well known short stories such as *Kali Shalwar* (Black Pants), *Toba Tek Singh* (Name of a city in Punjab close to Lahore) and *Khul do* (open it) was not only a critical response to the atrocities and confusions around the watershed historical moment of the "Divide" but it also reflected on the hasty

that was due to a number of factors: (1) there was not an appreciation of the importance of this time in the visual arts and consequently, there was little or no documentation of art and related art activities during the first decade; (2) because of a lack of access to exhibition venues, it is also possible the works of art were not publicly displayed; or (3) there were other more pressing issues in need of attention such as the plight of migrants/refugees who continued arriving in the new nation during the years of 1947-1950. All the aforementioned factors might have relegated the visual arts to a position of less importance. Nonetheless, during the formative years of the country, the field of fine arts started to develop in several different directions, thus, various artistic trends emerged in the newly formed country. There were three major centers/cities of art production in Pakistan (only Lahore had inherited two art institutions, the other cities Karachi, and Dacca (today's Bangladesh) established their art institutions later on. Several different artistic trends (mostly in painting) developed in these cities. Pre-partition senior artists, such as Anna Molka Ahmed (1917-1994), Ustad Allah Bux (1895-1775), and Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1899- 1975) were already residing in Lahore while Hassan Askari (1907-1968) and Fyzee Rahamin (1886-1964) settled in Karachi.¹⁴⁹ All these artists held prominent positions in the Pakistani art world after its establishment, with their respective Persian-Mughal, Bengal School and European academic painting styles. Among the younger generation, Zubeida Agha, the only artist at that time in West Pakistan had

decision of the partition. The famous poem of Faiz entitled, "*Subh e Azaadi*- August 1947" also reflected his views on the partition.

¹⁴⁹ Abdur Rahman Chughtai and Ustad Allah Bux resided in Lahore throughout their lifetimes, while Anna Molka, a British artist married a Pakistan painter Ahmed Sheikh in 1939 and made India her home.

received training from an Italian war prisoner in Lahore, Mario Perlingieri, who introduced her to western abstract art movements.¹⁵⁰ In East Pakistan, Zainul Abedin's (1918-1976) minimal modernist pen-and-ink drawings were popular. Hall Bevan Petman (1894-1980), a British European-trained painter, lived in India and later in Pakistan throughout his life and painted portraits of the nobility and landscapes, commissioned by the army of Pakistan. All these artists and their works will be discussed in this chapter. The following is an introduction to the two important art institutions in Lahore.¹⁵¹

1.7 Art Institutions in Pakistan

The Mayo School of Art, Lahore and its Role after the Establishment of Pakistan

The Mayo School of Art was the oldest establishment of the colonial era, established as an industrial art school under the tutelage of its first principal, John Lockwood Kipling, from 1870 to 1890. Among other notable people who led the school were historian Percy Brown (1897-1909), designer and architect Bhai Ram Singh (1909-1913), European miniaturist Lionel Heath (1913-1929), Indian modern artist S. N. Gupta (1929-1942), British art educator Sidney Spedding (1954-1956), American sculptor Mark

¹⁵⁰ Agha received her initial training from B.C Sanyal. Later, Agha's brother Abdul Hamid Agha introduced her to Italian war prisoner Mario Perlingieri, a student of Pablo Picasso, in 1946, lived in the suburbs of Lahore. Perlingieri guided her concerns about form and structure, liberating her from her earlier academic training in painting. However, belonging to an elite prominent family, she practiced her art in isolation from the mainstream art world of Pakistan. Nonetheless, she implicitly played a vital role in the development of modern art in Pakistan. She regularly held exhibitions of her work and was the first artist to open an art gallery, the Gallery of Contemporary Art, Rawalpindi.

¹⁵¹ This study since is centered on Lahore Art Circle.

Writer Sponenburgh (1958-1961), and Pakistani modern artist Shakir Ali (1961-1974). These individuals were the most prominent principals of the School. The Mayo School of Art was restructured and upgraded to the National College of Arts (NCA) in 1958 to provide art and design education rather than art and craft training to the modern artists of a newly independent nation.¹⁵² After this institution was being promoted to the college level, Mark Sponenburgh became the first principal of National College of Arts (NCA). Abdur Rahman Chughtai the most celebrated artists of pre-partition and later post-independence was educated at Mayo School of Arts. After graduation, he also taught there from 1916-1924. NCA has been the center of modern art, as the leadership of the school has been mostly in the hands of western artists and educators. Furthermore, Shakir Ali with his progressive vision took the college to a whole new level by introducing an encouraging Bauhaus curriculum.

The University of the Punjab, Lahore

Across the road from Mayo School of Arts, is the art department of the University of the Punjab, Lahore founded in 1882 by the British Raj, the only other inherited art institution at the time of Pakistan's establishment. The university's art department played an important role in the promotion of the visual arts in the newly established country.

Anna Molka Ahmed (1917-1994), a British-born artist married to a Pakistani artist Sheikh Ahmed (1901-1986), made India her home in 1938. In 1940, she was employed

¹⁵² The Mayo School of Art was restructured and upgraded as the National College of Arts (NCA) in 1958 to provide art and design education to the modern artists of a newly independent nation. Nadeem Omar Tarar, "Framings of a National Tradition Discourse on the Reinvention of Miniature Painting in Pakistan," *Third Text*, 25. 5(2011): 582.

by the colonial Indian Government to establish the department of fine arts exclusively for college-age females to enroll in painting as an elective subject for Intermediate and Bachelors of Arts degree. The students were encouraged to join the program without any prior training in drawing or painting. Anna Molka started the department with a small number of students and later had an enrollment of two hundred students at the time of Partition. When the department reopened after the Partition, there were only six returning students.¹⁵³ To re-energize this department, Anna Molka started to recruit students from local colleges in Lahore.

Since 1942, the Department of Fine Arts, University of Punjab has held annual exhibitions of paintings by their students and staff to create an interest in the fine arts. Being a prolific artist herself, Anna Molka's supervision of the department significantly contributed to cultivating the making and appreciation of art in Lahore. She invigorated its art scene by holding a number of art exhibitions in its university department after Partition since venues for such endeavors were limited.¹⁵⁴ Without doubt, Anna Molka's tireless effort and courage brought together artists from the various schools of thought

¹⁵³ *Catalogue of Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture*, (Lahore: University of the Punjab, Lahore, 1952)

¹⁵⁴ In her 1954 report in the exhibition catalog of painting, Molka reports, "A consignment of paintings from the art students of Texas University USA have recently arrived by the kind arrangements of the USIE. An exhibition of these paintings will be arranged in March along with the paintings of Pakistani art students. These paintings will then be sent to Texas University as an exchange exhibition." Besides this exchange, several female students were awarded scholarships to study art and art education in England by the education department (1953-54). In 1954, the name of the department was also changed from "Department of Arts and Crafts" to "Department of Fine Arts." Anna Molka Ahmed, *Painting Catalog* (Punjab University, 1954).

through several of the exhibitions that she held at the University of Punjab, Lahore.¹⁵⁵ They included both traditional and modern artists like Anna Molka Ahmed, Shakir Ali, Allah Bux, Abdur Rahman Chughtai, Syed Ali Imam, Moyene Najmi, and Anwar Jalal Shemza. Shields and medals were awarded to the artists participating in these exhibitions to boost their morale and encourage them to participate.

There has always been a stark divide between the academic curriculums of the two institutes. The University of the Punjab is considered conservative and more traditional in its academic approach as its art education is based on European academic realism. Although the Mayo School of Art started out as a craft center, it has always been considered more progressive and experimental.¹⁵⁶ In late 60s it even integrated the Bauhaus philosophy in its curriculum. Due to the scarcity of resources, the first graduates of the University of the Punjab taught in the Mayo School of Arts. While there was a divide between artistic approaches, they all worked together in a healthy environment with one objective in mind: to flourish and develop the field of fine arts in Pakistan.¹⁵⁷ To

¹⁵⁵ See exhibition catalogs of 1954,1956,1957 and *Vista Magazine* publication of 1960, 1961 and 1962, which were also publications of the University of Punjab. Anna Molka published Seven Monographs, regardless of the individual artists stylistic affinities. Except for Razia Ferroz's traditional approach to painting (who was also a member of LAC), all the others were modern artists, working completely opposite ways to Molka's own work, including artists like Shakir Ali (1957), Sheikh Safdar Ali (1957), Anwar Jalal Shemza (1956), Hanif Ramay (1956), Razia Ferroz (1954), Ozzir Zuby(1953), and Ahmed Parvez (1953).

¹⁵⁶ Atteqa Ali in her PhD dissertation discusses this. See Atteqa Ali, "Impassioned Play: Social Commentary and Formal Experimentation in Contemporary Pakistani Art," (PhD diss. at The University of Texas, Austin, 2008), 30-31.

¹⁵⁷ This included artists like Allah Bakhsh, Chughtai, Shakir, Shemza, Moyene Najmi, Ali Imam. Shields and medal were awarded to the artists participating in these exhibitions to encourage and boost their moral. The artists were included in the exhibitions as well as given the responsibilities to serve on various committees. In a way at this time as much as there was a divide between the various schools of thoughts between the artists they all worked together in a healthy environment with one objective in mind to flourish and develop the field of Fine arts in Pakistan.

further the study of the artistic environment that encouraged the formation of the LAC in its formative years, various artistic modes of artists working in Pakistan will be analyzed.

Abdur Rahman Chughtai

At the time of partition, Chughtai was forty-nine years old and the most prominent artist in Pakistan. As mentioned earlier, his work evoking a Muslim identity became a symbol of the national art of Pakistan. During the country's formative years, he worked tirelessly for the newly established country, designing the first postal stamp and logos for the national radio and television cooperation. Salima Hashmi, Pakistani artist, writer, educationist, and curator points out, "The combination of exquisite draftsmanship and literary knowledge earned Chughtai a higher rank among his other peers. He was the only one who was commissioned to design logos and other art related projects of the state institutions as if he was the most qualified one."¹⁵⁸

In general, the Pakistani public perceived Chughtai's work after partition as traditional because of his practice, which was too close to the Bengal School. His lyrical, floating, dreamlike romanticized figures, fully clothed with voluminous draperies, were considered an emblem of orientalism and became the model for art that came to be expected of the new Islamic nation. Hence, his work was viewed stemming from pre-partition India, and thus out of kilter with changing times and circumstances. Later on, realizing that decolonization after Partition provided an experimental and creative

¹⁵⁸ Salima Hashmi in discussion with the author, July 2012.

atmosphere, Chughtai started to shift his work in the direction of themes that address modern life in Pakistan, while still maintaining his signature style of painting.¹⁵⁹

His painting *College Girls*, (figure 1.11), etching *Hostel Girls* (figure 1.12) and other such works are examples of such an approach. In *Hostel Girls* (figure 1.12), two young women are dressed in modern-day attire, known not only for its tailoring but also by its design. The woman on left wears a tunic-like dress with a floral design, and the woman on the right sports a checkered bodice combined with a dotted fabric to form a dress. Both of the women are not wearing any head coverings or scarves, and this change differ from Chughtai's earlier work of traditional Muslim women as seen in *Jahan Ara and Taj* (figure 1.9). The short hair of both the ladies is quite a remarkable symbol that stands out to indicate both figures belonging to a modern society. The woman on the right is wearing sunglasses—something never depicted before in Pakistani or even, in Indian Paintings. Her seated position on the edge of the table is itself an act of defiance of the traditional norms that dictate ladies to behave in a certain demure manner. Is this painting that depicts the young women in defiance of all traditions referring to the idea of changing times?

The background of this etching indicates a specific setting with a bookshelf on the left side of the painting and a table with a tall flower vase on the right side. There is also a curtain between the table and the bookshelf, which is richly textured. The specificity of the background and the use of texture also differ from Chughtai's earlier paintings with flat and blank backgrounds. However, the facial features of the two figures

¹⁵⁹ See Marcella Sirhindi, "Abdur Rahman Chughtai: A Modern South Asian Artist" (PhD diss., Oklahoma University, 1984). In her study she has framed Chughtai as a modern artist.

are in the classic Chughtai style, including the rendering of half-closed almond-shaped eyes, sharp nose, and small pouting lips in accord with the still romantic image of a perfect Indian woman as painted in traditional Mughal miniature paintings. The title of the etching “ Hostel Girls” is a bold statement since education in South Asian society, for women is not a given right, and the idea of women living in a hostel is unusual and would not have been favorably received in society at large. Finally, the choice of medium for this work, which is etching, is itself a modern medium. In short, the image synthesized aspects of modern life that have changed a number of traditions even though the traditional rendering of the women’s facial features still designate the image as belonging to the East. Pakistani art critic, Safdar Mir sums up the artistic practices prevalent in Pakistan as follows:

Chughtai’s position was that of a giant in the classical tradition, who stood apart from both the academic colonial mode and the latest trends and influences from the west, best symbolized by the person of Amrita Sher-Gil. With independence, there was a break in the continuity. Of all the new trend setters[sic] of the thirties and forties, the only one left was Anna Molka Ahmed, who bravely tried to carry on the struggle for the establishment of modern painting in Lahore.¹⁶⁰

Anna Molka Ahmed (1917-1994)

Anna Molka Ahmed not only did Anna Molka established the fine arts department at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, but she also single-handedly promoted art education in newly established Pakistan of an institution, which earlier had been designated for women. Besides her contributions to the government institution, Anna

¹⁶⁰ Safdar Mir, “Shakir Ali’s Contribution,” Jan 28, 1975, name of the newspaper is not available. The reference is from Ali Imam’s archive Karachi: Foundation of Museum of Modern Art.

Molka established an art club called “Hut” at the Pakistan Arts Council in Lahore in 1957 to conduct drawing classes for children and adults. She also hosted social gatherings with other young artists at her home, all with the goal of promoting a more conducive environment for the development, appreciation, and enjoyment of art in her newly formed country.

Anna Molka herself painted rural landscapes and portraits, as well as political and religious themes in European expressionist style. She studied painting, sculpture and design at St. Martin School of Arts, London. *Burqa* (figure 1.13) is a typical representation of Anna Molka’s expressionist, social realist paintings. The painting depicts a portrait of an old woman wearing the *Burqa* (traditional cloak usually covers the full female body), which is pushed back on the head to expose a melancholic face. The slightly diagonally tilted face of the old woman has been captured with extreme care. Thick paint with a palette knife has been applied in impasto. On closer observation one cannot ignore the disconnect that exists between the face and the bust of the old woman. The face is carefully rendered with a close observation of the model; however, the bust wrapped in the *Burqa* seems to be painted without observation. The folds of the fabric have been simplified, and they look less like fabric and more like waves, complimenting the melancholic mood of the painting. The use of *chiaroscuro* in the painting creates an intriguing play of light and dark. Although the background is blank, the palette knife creates a texture different from the portrait. The *Burqa* that has been folded backward creates a mandorla-like impression, similar to that was used in 5th, century early Christian iconography of Christ. Instead of a halo around the head of Christ, an almond shape

shadow would enhance the full body of the Christ. In this painting, Molka seems to be using the cloak to protect the body of a poor and old woman while tucked to expose her sadness.

Molka combines her European training of expressionist painting with the regional socialist realism of the East to invent her own modern syntax. Her work differs from any previous Indian or Pakistani artists working in expressionist style.

Across from the University of the Punjab, Lahore, another miniature artist from pre-partition India was working and teaching at Mayo School of Art.

Haji Sharif (1889- 1978)

Haji Sharif was a court painter from the Patiala family of Muslim painters. He painted themes of Mughals and Sikhs in the Mughal miniature style. He was on the faculty of the Mayo School of Art (now NCA) from 1945 to 1966, where he taught painting and tried to revive the Indian miniature painting in its true spirit of virtuosity of skill.¹⁶¹ Haji Sharif worked mostly in obscurity until 1962, when Mark Sponenburgh, the first principal of the NCA, and Faiz Ahmad Faiz the poet and secretary of the Lahore Arts Council launched Sharif's first solo exhibition. The artist was then seventy-five years old when he marked his official entry into the Pakistani art scene. Motivated by a nationalist impulse "to revive the art of old-style Indian miniature painting in the province," the exhibition was inaugurated by the President of Pakistan himself, Field

¹⁶¹ Marcella Sirhind. *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan*. (Lahore: Ferozsons Ltd., 1992), 39.

Marshall Ayub Khan.¹⁶² Most likely Haji Sharif did not receive any attention in Pakistan's formative years because the miniature painting was confined to copying Mughal era paintings, or pre-colonial Hindu religious themes. By the time Pakistan was established, the status of miniature painting was considered no more than a mere technical skill and was perceived as not holding any creative potential. Therefore, Haji Sharif was appointed to teach in the Mayo School of Art in 1945 as an *Ustad* (one who is a highly skilled person, and only a teacher).

Figure 1.14 is an example of a fine work of Haji Sharif's miniature painting. The work is a copy of a typical representation of Hindu goddess *Kali* standing over her consort, the god *Shiva*. *Kali*, also known as the goddess of time, means "black" and symbolizes the forces of time. *Shiva*, however, rubs the ashes of dead people on his skin, making his body white. Their respective roles connect them to Night (*Kali*) and Day (*Shiva*). In terms of the narrative of the painting, there is nothing exceptional or innovative about its symbolisms used. However, the outstanding aspect of this painting is its size, which is only 1.96" x 1.2," which testifies to the consummate skill of the artist. The medium is *wasli* (handmade special paper for miniature painting), and special brushes have been used to paint on such minuscule level. The brushes are handmade from the tails of baby squirrels. The paint is applied in almost a pointillist manner, layer by layer, to achieve the desired color. The painting technique is laborious, and enormously

¹⁶² Tarar, "Framings of a National Tradition Discourse on the Reinvention of Miniature Painting in Pakistan," 585.

time consuming. During his teaching career at the Mayo School, traditional miniature painter, Haji Sharif was not successful in catering a great number of students.¹⁶³

A contemporary of Haji Sharif in terms of age and obscure status is another highly skilled artist Ustad Allah Bux. Although their styles differ from each other, they received the same level of recognition as Pakistani artists in its early years, which was that of a skilled worker and not an innovative artist like Chughtai. He was a humble painter and became just like Haji Sharif, as an old-fashioned master craftsman, and worked tirelessly to master his skills. His admirers gave him the title of *Ustad* (meaning a respected teacher, or one who is highly skilled), an honorific that could also be justly given to a head tailor or a carpenter. He had a studio in Lahore and generously trained students with his mastered skills.

Allah Bux (1895-1978)

Allah Bux was born in Wazirabad, Punjab, in 1895. Initially trained as a sign painter, he later earned a living by painting set designs for a theatrical company in Bombay. For many years, he was associated with different courts of Hindu Rajas as their official painter. Before the Partition (and like Haji Sharif) he painted popular Hindu religious paintings in Ravi Varma's style and was known as a Krishna painter, after one of Hindu gods. He returned to Lahore in 1940, where he established himself as a

¹⁶³ Today Pakistani artists like Shazia Sikander, Imran Qureshi and Ayesha Khalid have created quite a stir in international contemporary art because of their innovations in the realm of miniature paintings. All of these artists were trained in traditional miniature painting at NCA under Bashir Mirza who was the second-generation pupil of Haji Sharif.

respected artist, however, he never moved beyond the Indian colonial art of Victorian England. After the establishment, of Pakistan, he too realized the need to acclimate his themes to the Islamic republic of Pakistan. He painted large-scale history scenes, portraits, regional literary romantic legends, local folk tales, and landscapes in his immaculate European academic style.¹⁶⁴ Akbar Naqvi notes that, although Allah Bux had great admirers of his paintings in Lahore, he did not inspire Lahore's intellectuals because of his former social position as a sign painter.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, he was never able to receive equal status to Chughtai. Naqvi writes, "It is surprising that despite the Ustad's wide circle of admirers—which included writers, teachers, High Court Judges and industrialists—he was not presented in the light that he deserved. Instead, his image was of an unlettered painter who had picked up the Western manner by luck."¹⁶⁶

Sohni Mahiwal (figure 1.15) shows the exquisite skill of Allah Bux, which reminds one of Ravi Varma's style in his portrayal of characters as ordinary human beings. The painting depicts the famous local legend of *Sohni Mahiwal*. The story tells of a young couple in love but could not marry due to the social class difference. Sohni, the female protagonist, was married off to someone else, but still met her beloved Mahiwal in secret. To meet him, she crossed a river over a terracotta utensil every night. Sohni's sister in law, however, found out about Sohni's secret. One night she replaced the terracotta utensil with a raw one, which resulted in Sohni's drowning in the river. The

¹⁶⁴ Both Chughtai and Allah Bux in their earlier painting careers used to paint Hindu themes such as Radha Krishna and scenes of the *Mahabharata* respectively. The nationalist Indian movement of the 1940s mainly focused on Hindu nationalism.

¹⁶⁵ Akbar Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 106.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

painting captures the moment as Mahiwal is singing of his great longing for Sohni while Sohni's dead body floats across the river in front of him. The mood of the painting in accord with the legend is romantic and beautiful. The painting resembles British Pre-Raphaelite artist John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* (1851-52), based on the character from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In Allah Bux's painting, the male and female figures are unmistakably Indian. One might wonder if Allah Bux came across Millais's painting through a reproduction in a book, as it is a famous and often reproduced painting. Because of the aging and crackling of the painted surface, it is hard to see the brush strokes of the painting but the overall work looks like a very competent example of European naturalistic style. Allah Bux's painting *Sohni Mahiwal* (figure 1.15) exemplifies the sophisticated hybridity of western aesthetics and eastern subject matter.

Henry Charles “Hal” Bevan Petman (1894-1980)

Bevan Petman was a British painter trained at the Slade School of Arts, London, had lived in British India since the late 1930s. He was best known for his portraits of society women. From early in his career his great skill as an academic painter earned him commissions of official, picturesque “See India” type posters for India Tourism. During his residence in Simla between 1921 and 1923, he also taught young Amrita Sher-Gil, who is known as the most talented avant-garde artist of India.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Romano Karim Yousaf, *The Petman Girls* http://www.halbevanpetman.com/petman_taught_amrita.html (accessed on Nov 22, 2015). Amrita Sher-Gil's biography confirms that she was in Simla with her family between 1921 and 1924 before she enrolled in the Santa Annunziata, art school in Italy.

After the Partition, Petman settled in Rawalpindi, Pakistan and started painting commissioned projects of notable military and civilian personalities as well as their spouses. He was also commissioned to paint military battle scenes, which adorned the walls of various Pakistani military academic institutions. He is well known in Pakistan for his series of portrait paintings of ladies of elite families, which he would often paint during their vacations to the popular Pakistani hill stations to Murree and Bhurbhan.¹⁶⁸ Petman's work has not been acknowledged in the published history of Pakistani art, perhaps because of his commercial affiliations. Because his patrons were often wealthy his works were never exhibited in public spaces and were confined to domestic collections. Only in recent years his work started to surface mainly and his series of portraits of young socialites are now known as "Petman Girls." *Sherri* (figure 1.16) is an example of this work, which represents his ability to work in a fashionable classical European academic style. His portraits were evidently intended to be true to life, were exaggerated, and yet like society portraits in the West painted by Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641), Petman painted a number of his female clients.

Zubeida Agha (1922-1997)

Zubeida Agha was the first woman artist to hold a solo exhibition of her modern work and the exhibition took place in 1949 at Karachi. Zubeida was born in Lyallpur

¹⁶⁸ Romano Karim Yousuf and Taqi Shaheen made a documentary film called "The Petman Girls," in which they have revisited eight of the Pakistan ladies in Petman's portraits. Yousuf's research project on Petman is in progress, and it will no doubt result in a book.

(now Faisalabad) in 1922 to a middle-class, progressive Muslim family.¹⁶⁹ Zubeida received her Bachelors of Arts in Philosophy from the prestigious Kinnaird College, Lahore for women. Her parents believed in quality education for their daughters as well as their sons, therefore, they fully supported her when she showed an interest in painting. Her brother Agha Abdul Hamid, a high-ranking officer in government service, was also well versed in art and literature and wrote articles on art and reviews of exhibitions. Realizing Zubeida's interest, he arranged art lessons for her, first with the well-known Lahore-based artist Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal (1901-2003), gave her lessons in traditional painting techniques.¹⁷⁰ Later Mario Perlingieri, an Italian war prisoner and one-time student of Picasso, was residing in the suburbs of Lahore and also helped further Zubeida's art education. Perlingieri introduced Zubeida to the abstract art of the West. Zubeida was very much interested in painting ideas rather than objects. Pakistani art critic, Nasir Shamsie emphasizes that Perlingieri's teaching profoundly impacted Zubeida as he was able to boost her confidence to pursue and invent her own language in painting. He liberated her from her previous art practice, which had followed in the academic discipline.¹⁷¹ Her 1949 solo exhibition of abstract paintings in Karachi, created uproar among the general public, as well as with writers and artists. In the first book on Pakistani art history, the art critic Jalal Uddin Ahmed stated, "Zubeida insisted that her paintings do

¹⁶⁹ Mussarat Hussan, *Zubeida Agha*, 15.

¹⁷⁰ Sanyal was not associated with any of the academic institutes but use to run his studio from his apartment, where he had several apprentices work under him.

¹⁷¹ Nasir Shamsie, "Introduction," *Exhibition Catalog Of Zubeida Agha*, 1957.

not consists of symbols, which are creations of individual imagination, but of ideas, which because they are real, are universally understood.”¹⁷²

Zubeida’s painting *Karachi by Night* (figure 1.17) is an abstract representation of the lively and bustling cosmopolitan city of Karachi, which was also the capital of Pakistan until 1959. The simple rectangular shapes on the left and right sides of the painting are rendered with primary colors of red, yellow, and blue, which look like illuminated high-rise buildings as the sun in the distance. The background is ambiguously painted with broad brushstrokes of various shades of blue. Toward the base of the painting, the background gives an impression of seawater that gradually fuses with the sky. The center of the painting is enhanced with several black, claw-like thick lines randomly fanning across the picture frame and connected to smaller rectangles, which makes one think of cranes. There are also several candle-like lights spread across the painting that may be intended to capture the ambience of Karachi, which is known as the city of lights. Since Karachi is both an industrial center and also a port on the Arabian Sea, this painting may be a commentary of the rapid progress of this urban center that was happening in the early years of Pakistan’s formation.

Being a woman painter who defied many eastern painting traditional norms, making her work naturally different from Chughtai, Amrita Sher-Gil, Anna Molka, and Haji Sharif even created a stir in early Pakistani art scene. Zubeida’s work represented a challenge for this nation’s power elite who was struggling to define themselves as either traditional Muslims or modern Pakistanis.

¹⁷² Jalaluddin Ahmed. *The Art of Pakistan* (Karachi: Pakistan Publications, 1954),106.

Although Zubeida's cutting-edge western style abstract work had a profound impact on Pakistan's artists and intellectuals, she did not mingle with male artists. She continued her art practice away from her peers and never physically took part in any debates and conversations of the modernist artists of Lahore who will be discussed in Chapter 4.¹⁷³ From 1950 to 1953 she lived in London and joined St. Martin's School; she later joined the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris. On her return to Pakistan in 1953, she settled in Islamabad and became the Executive Director of Contemporary Art Galleries, Rawalpindi. The second city that became a center of arts after 1947 was Karachi. Two of the prominent artists Hassan Askari and Fyzee Rahamin deliberately settled in Karachi to cultivate a creative environment in the city.

KARACHI

Karachi, the metropolitan port city located on the coastline of the Arabian Sea, became the capital of Pakistan after its establishment in 1947. Although it was bustling with industrial development, the art scene was not as vibrant as it was in Lahore. It was not until 1954 that the Arts Council of Pakistan in Karachi was established. Unlike artists in Lahore, very few Karachi artists were native to their city. Most of them migrated there from India after the Partition. Among the most prominent were Fyzee Rahamin and Syed Hassan Askari. The Karachi Fine Arts Society, established in 1951, started to organize

¹⁷³ Art critic Nilofer Farrukh also mentions Zubeida's isolation in her essay "Decolonizing the Spirit" Printed in *Art India, Pakistan Issue*, Sep 2, 2008. She considers this isolation to be a result of social taboos for young women seen in the company of male artists and poets at their nocturnal meetings at Lahore's coffee houses where debates usually continued well into the night. <http://www.vaslart.org/xhtml/artpublic/arttxt/niilofur-farrukh/decolonizing-the-spirit.pdf> (accessed on Feb 15, 2013).

regular solo and group exhibitions for local artists, as well as drawing and painting classes for art students and the general public.

Hassan Askari (1907-1968)

Figure 1.18 is a painting by the oriental painter Hassan Askari, trained at the Lucknow College of Arts and Crafts, India. Hassan Askari taught at his alma mater for thirty years and also served as the principal of the college. In British India, Askari was a well-known history and portrait painter. He did not migrate to Pakistan at the time of Partition but later in 1949. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaqat Ali Khan, invited him to settle in Karachi, where he undertook several government and private commissions. His specialty was large-scale oil paintings of dignitaries that provided him with many opportunities for depicting such details as the richness of velvet, sheen of satin, and sparkles of jewelry.¹⁷⁴ He was a man of many skills; besides designing furniture, making murals, modeling reliefs in plaster, he wrote a sumptuous edition of *Marsiyas* (historical elegies of Anees).¹⁷⁵ He also published mostly biographical articles on Pakistani artists.

Fyzee Rahamin (1886-1964)

Fyzee Rahamin was born in Poona (British India). He studied at the Royal Academy of Arts in London where he apprenticed under John Singer Sargent and consequently established his reputation as an academic portrait painter in addition to be

¹⁷⁴ Sirhandi. *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan*, 52.

¹⁷⁵ S. Amjad Ali, "The Paintings: Askari," *Pakistan Quarterly* 3:4 (1954): 42-47.

becoming a writer before moving back to India.¹⁷⁶ Soon after his move to India, Fyzee integrated the Mughal and Rajput miniature styles into his painting. Thus, his work became simplified and two dimensional, much like the style of the Bengal School and Chughtai. Fyzee was not only close in style to Chughtai but also close to him in age. He was sixty-seven years old in 1947, when the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, invited him to settle in Pakistan from Bombay, to invigorate art activities in Karachi. Fyzee's work *Chand Bibi* (figure 1.19) is a portrait of a legendary Indian queen of sixteenth century. In many ways the painting is an abstract representation. The proportions and positioning of the female figure are purposefully distorted in an artistic manner while the horse is rendered with a long, proud, stylized neck. The servant walking next to the queen, on horseback, looks like a character from a miniature painting and the princess's dress is a traditional Indian royal dress. The facial features of the princess, however, are somewhat European and a character type. There are not many commonalities between the work of Chughtai and Fyzee except for similarities in the background treatments of their paintings, which are flat and blank from the application of water-based paint. In a way, the abstraction and stylization of the figures and environment of the painting may be read as modern. However, after moving to Karachi, Fyzee did not make much art, as he was involved in the planning and making of the National Gallery Karachi.

¹⁷⁶ Sirhandi. *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan*, 54. S. Amjad Ali, "Fyzee Rahamin." *Pakistan Quarterly* 1:3(1952):16-21.

DACCA- East Pakistan (now Dhaka- Bangladesh)

The third city after the Partition to be set up with art institution was Dacca. Heavily populated with a Muslim majority, Dacca (the capital of East Pakistan) is located in the center of Bengal (now Bangladesh). In 1948, the renowned painter-teacher of the Calcutta School of Art, Zainul Abedin established the Government Institute of Arts and Crafts (now Institute of Fine Arts) in Dacca, which later was affiliated with the Dhaka University in 2008.

Zain ul Abidin (1918-1976)

Zain ul Abedin was already well known as an exceptional artist in British India. His 1943 pen-and-ink, schematic series of drawings on the theme of the Bengal famine earned him over-night fame in India. Brought up in poor and difficult circumstances, Zain received his formal education from the Government College of Art & Craft in Calcutta (now also called Kolkata), where he also taught until 1947. After Partition he was made head of the Dacca Institute of Arts. Zain's initial training was in the European academic style and, for a short period of time, he painted in this manner.¹⁷⁷ Using this European academic sensibility, he later developed a more realist and expressionist mode of working.

Untitled, (figure 1.20) instantiates the outstanding characteristic of his work including his strong sweeping calligraphic lines that very much resemble old Chinese master paintings. In fact his use of line seems to be derived from the Zen tradition of

¹⁷⁷ Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 349.

Japanese painting. Pakistani artist and writer, Ijaz ul Hassan writes, “Zainul Abedin considers his work as an ‘expression’ rather than a creation.”¹⁷⁸ His abbreviated yet telling pen-and-ink expressionist drawings are modern and conceptually similar to Rabindranath Tagore’s paintings, which were also semi-abstract, economical, and expressive while conveying the artist’s *Bhava*. Zain’s invention of this individual style is notable and his role in setting up the art college in Dacca is important, though there is no evidence of this institution’s students followed his trajectory.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of art in pre-Partition India to contextualize the art production in the new nation of Pakistan that actually builds upon its previously explored notion of hybridity. By discussing selective artists in India during this time, it has demonstrated that, due to the rich and eclectic culture of India, the combining of eastern and western ideas in so many different artists works and various movements is indicative of the fact that hybridity has been an inherent part of Indian art and its presence and effects have continued. As other scholars have noted, the dialogue between tradition, modernity and nationalism during colonialism became most prominent in the visual arts. The simultaneous development of various approaches and schools of art with different stylistic orientation in India continuously challenged the definition of modernism. For example, the introduction of academic naturalism in India (through various art institutes and reproduction of art in mass production) as seen and discussed in

¹⁷⁸ Ijaz ul Hassan. *Painting in Pakistan* (Lahore: Ferozson, 1991), 55.

the work of Varma and Roy's oleographs which at various times conveyed different subject matters. This contributed to the meaning of what constituted modern art and how it continued to change over time in India with its political and social conditions. The adoption of western painting styles and breaking away from previous Indian practices of two-dimensional representation represented Indian artists mimicry of the colonizer to compete on equal footing. At the same time this hybridization of the western aesthetics with the tradition, such as in Company painting as a first example, followed by Ravi Varma and Jamini Roy— was firmly grounded in the Indian context. The use of traditional/ indigenous painting sensibilities and materials also became a tool of resistance against colonialism making the art emblematic of Indian nationalism. The historical rupture of Partition again reset the art scene on both sides of the borders and became the backdrop for framing the rise of the Lahore Art Circle.

Chapter 2

The Founding of Lahore Art Circle (LAC-1952) and Shakir Ali (1916-1975)

Shakir joined the Mayo School of Art, and what is more important, came across a small group of very young and very violent enthusiasts of painting. These young painters had similar problems and a similar attitude towards their solution. They are all iconoclasts, individualist, and breakers of traditions, mad. They were young. They believed in doing whatever they pleased. New experiences and an expanded scope had come their way. A new nation was trying to forge itself into a unity to face the challenges of freedom.¹⁷⁹

The description above by Safdar Mir, Professor of English literature at Government College Lahore, brilliantly captures the conditions that led to the founding of LAC—a small, but dynamic, group of six Pakistani artists who together changed the course of modern art in Pakistan. This chapter focuses on the artist Shakir Ali, and his role not only as a catalyst in the establishment of LAC artists' collective but more importantly, by including Shakir Ali himself as an active member of LAC, an aspect that has not been discussed in previous scholarship. Based on unpublished primary documents related to LAC uncovered during the research of this study, this chapter's analysis will provide a framework to contextualize the ways in which the United States cultural diplomacy directly supported and provided strategic platforms for this burgeoning group of radical artists. To understand the artistic climate within South Asia's post-colonial

¹⁷⁹ Safdar Mir, "Shakir Ali: Painters' Painter," *Contemporary Art in Pakistan*, 1:6 (1960), 3.

context, this study proposes that LAC saw itself as a parallel to the influential avant-garde Progressive Artists Group (PAG), founded on the eve of Partition. At a crucial time when India was just liberated from colonial rule and separated into the two nations of India and Pakistan, PAG was the first artist group to redefine Indian modernism in its own terms and in dialogue with the movements of international modernism. Unlike the earlier nationalist Bengal Art School's rejection of western idioms fueled by the anti-British sentiments, PAG artists viewed themselves as representing a modern, secular, and progressive nation of India, and hence, sought a visual language in concert with the modernism. Thus, the close analysis of the two collectives undertaken in this chapter becomes a worthwhile case study, as LAC can be read deliberately establishing a parallel modernism in Pakistan a few years later in 1952, while negotiating the rhetoric of the new identity of an Islamic state. Because PAG was established before LAC, with obvious similarities and connections that existed between the two given the shared socio-political conditions, a comparative overview of PAG will be critical to understanding the formation and vision of LAC. In exploring the similarities and differences between the two groups, and using the manifesto of PAG, this dissertation also proposes a parallel art manifesto for LAC to comprehend the contexts in which they were able to subvert the mainstream nationalist agenda.

2.1 Shakir Ali (1916-1975)

A key figure in the history of modernism in Pakistan is Shakir Ali whose contributions to the founding of LAC have hitherto not been highlighted. His arrival in

Lahore in 1952 from Europe, and his association with the intelligentsia in Lahore indeed initiated a significant change in this art scene. Like the celebrated modern artist Zubeida Agha, Shakir's work engaged with western modern art movements of the early 20th century and played a pivotal role in helping to shape modern art in the newly established Pakistan. His work especially affected LAC. Shakir's role as artist, mentor, thinker, and intellectual subsequently invigorated modern art in Pakistan through the collective works of LAC artists. The importance of Shakir Ali as an influential figure cannot be over-estimated as his work, intellect, and mentorship changed the course of artistic practice in Pakistan during its early formative years (1947-57); thus paving a progressive path for the future generations of artists. In one of his essays, Shakir Ali writes:

I often feel that in this cycle of birth and death, I was born sometimes in the period of Altamira caves. I feel like I lived and painted with them. Then again I think I was born in Crete and I was one of the bull dancers. I was with them as well as painting frescoes. I was also perhaps one of those people who have been during the period of Akhenaten and have painted Nefertiti. Then perhaps I was in Ajanta.¹⁸⁰

His statement above is profound and beautiful can be interpreted in several different ways. One obvious way to interpret it is that he identifies himself as a universalist—a culmination of many traditions—being born and reborn in various places and civilizations. The fact that he is always born in places where he can make art points to the inherent artist in him. He subtly indicates that his work encompasses characteristics of all of these

¹⁸⁰ Sheema Majid. Ed. "Mera Fun," *Shakir Ali: fun aur Shaksiyat*, 17, translated from Urdu to English by Syed Ali Imam in his article "Shakir Ali: Artists of Pakistan," *Pakistan Pictorial* 14(March-April 1975), 29.

world civilizations by connecting to their simplicity, forms, and materiality in which he embraces the past within the global context to find a vocabulary to suit this persona.

Shakir was born on March 6, 1916 in Rampur in north India into the well-known family of the Indian nationalist, Maulana Shaukat Ali (1873-1938) and Maulana Mohammad Ali (1879-1931). Shakir's father was an engineer and his mother a housewife, who died early in his childhood. Shakir received his initial education from a private European tutor at home; he was then sent to Jamia Millia Islamia for his primary education.¹⁸¹ After completing middle school he was sent to the prestigious Philanders Smith College in Nainital for his British Senior Cambridge exams.¹⁸² Pakistani art critic Akbar Naqvi suggests that the back-and-forth switch of Shakir from one educational system to the other (East to West) persisted throughout his life and, in fact, became the leitmotif of his artistic career.¹⁸³ This interpretation seems plausible because later in his art he takes up the approach of combining the two.

Shakir wanted to write fiction and learn dance at Rabindranath Tagore's University, Vishva Bharati in Shantiniketan in Calcutta, known for its strong Hindu nationalist and anti-British tendencies. However, Shakir moved to Delhi in 1937 and he began his training in the field of fine arts at the Ukil brothers' Studio there. At their

¹⁸¹ During the anti-colonial Islamic activism of the 1920s, the institute was established in response to the non-cooperation movement of the Indian National Congress and against the British education system. For more details see http://jmi.ac.in/aboutjamia/profile/history/historical_note-13 Jamia Millia Islamia: A Central University. accessed on Dec 10, 2015

¹⁸² During the British Raj in India, the Senior Cambridge examinations were introduced. They are General Certificate of Education examinations according to the British system and are still in practice in Pakistan, India, and other post-colonial countries.

¹⁸³ Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 201-202.

studio he learned to paint in the Bengal School style. In 1938, he enrolled in the Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art (Sir J.J. School of Arts), Mumbai (previously Bombay), where he was introduced to the European naturalistic style of painting as well as the aesthetics of Indian Ajanta cave paintings.¹⁸⁴ The faculty of the J.J. School of Arts viewed themselves as more progressive than the nationalist Bengal School, because their curriculum embraced the European naturalism painting as well as traditional Indian painting aesthetics. Since Shakir was exposed to traditional Indian painting, the Bengal School, and western styles, he developed an appreciation for all of them. He is said to have admired the rusticity of the traditional Kangra style of Rajput painting and was familiar with the works of the old European masters such as the late Renaissance Italian painter Tintoretto (1518-1594) and Greek mannerist painter El Greco (1541-1614).¹⁸⁵ Among modern western artists, Shakir was inspired by the works of Georges Braque (1882-1963), and Henri Matisse (1869-1954). Assembly of artists and traditions shows that rather than being appreciating any specific culture or style, Shakir valued many different arts and, therefore, the works he produced encompassed various range of aesthetic perspectives both from the East and the West. Unfortunately there is virtually no documentation of Shakir's earlier works (1938 to 1940) that exist currently to reflect concretely this eclectic vision. His earliest extant works are two small-scale watercolor paintings on paper, *The Village Scene with Three Deers* (figure 2.1), and *Untitled* (figure 2.2), dated from 1941 to 1943 both reflect his earlier training in regional styles. Although

¹⁸⁴ Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 121.

¹⁸⁵ Ali Imam contends that Shakir's earlier work was inspired by Gujarati and Jain miniature painting. See Ali Imam, "Shakir Ali," *Dawn News*, (Karachi, Dec 20, 1987)

the dates of the paintings indicate that Shakir at this time was studying at the J.J. School of Arts, which followed European art movements such as cubism, and School of Paris's lyrical representational art loosely based on such fauves as Raoul Dufy (1877-1953). However, it is surprising to see that Shakir follows the indigenous aesthetics of Bengal School style as seen in *Bharat Mata* (figure 1.3)¹⁸⁶ in his two paintings *The Village Scene with Three Deers* (figure 2.1) and *Untitled* (figure 2.2), although Shakir was already familiar with the western style. It is important to remember that the early 1940s in India was a period of the anti-British sentiment, which also dictated, as earlier suggested by Naqvi that this anti-imperialist attitude might be seen as a factor in Shakir's earlier childhood education wherein he switched back and forth between the eastern and western education system.¹⁸⁷ The scale of the paintings in *The Village Scene with Three Deers* (figure 2.1) and *Untitled* (figure 2.2) (10" x 8" and 16" x 14.5" respectively) is small similar to traditional Indian miniature paintings, while the technique is in the Bengal School style as a conscious rejection of the western academic style. The vitality of the lines has been toned down from the earlier Bengal School style; however it acquires a lyrical character; hence, the dynamic line enhances movement and forms, be they human, animal or foliage. The round and sharp features of female faces are rendered with elegant lines, conveying a sense of nostalgia and romanticism. In *The Village Scene with Three*

¹⁸⁶ Shakir was at this time completing, his masters' course of mural painting in the style of Ajanta paintings at the J.J. School of Arts.

¹⁸⁷ Shakir received his preliminary education from a European tutor and then he was sent to Jamia Milia—a strictly Congress-oriented educational system which was opposed to the British education system and based on Gandhian teachings, believing in a collaborative exchange of information between teacher and student—to receive his education. After completing his middle school he was sent off to an English school in Nainital for his senior Cambridge examination. Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 201-202.

Deers (figure 2.1), the elongated forms of ideal Indian feminine beauty are simplified and idealized, at the same time they are reminiscent of the Bengal School. The figures in the background are rendered as silhouettes with flat colors devoid of any of the linear detailing that prominently characterizes the figures in the foreground. Previously, such scholars as Iftikhar Dadi, Akbar Naqvi, and Simone Wille has attributed this particular painting as the Hindu epic of Ram, Sita, and Lakshman, but their connection cannot be ichnographically substantiated.¹⁸⁸ The characters and scene do not match the mythological story of “Golden Deer” from the *Ramayana* in which Sita wants Ram to capture the bejeweled golden deer that she spotted in the jungle. The golden deer was actually a trap of evil Ravana to capture Ram and Sita. In the context of the depicted subject, *The Village Scene with Three Deers* (figure 2.1) appears more like an idyllic village scene in which the three domesticated deer correlate with the localized context of the subject. The painting stands as a strong marker of Shakir’s Bengal School period, yet exemplifies Shakir’s natural mastery of the then retro Bengal style, consciously imitating the glorious Indian visual repertoire with a subtle overlay of the predominately formalist approach of the modern masters. As will be further discussed in Chapter 3, Shakir Ali’s exploration and conscious selection of a distinctive visual language indeed represent his unique artistic journey from a pre-independence artist in India to Pakistan’s leading modern artist.

¹⁸⁸ *The Village Scene with Three Deers* (figure 2.1), has been discussed in Naqvi’s, *Image and Identity*, 203, and Dadi’s, *Modern Art of Muslim South Asia*, 121, Wille’s. *Modern Art of Pakistan: History, Tradition, Place* (India: Routledge, 2014),23, and referred as Ram, Sita, and Laksman.

2.1 a. Shakir Ali in Europe (1946-1951)

In 1946, Shakir, now well versed in Bengal School and European academic art, went to London to study arts at the Slade School of Arts. Shakir Ali was one of the first few artists who went to London from British India to further his studies in studio arts. He worked under André Lhote (1885-1962) in Paris for six months between 1949 and 1950. Later, British government awarded him a scholarship as a Pakistani national to study textile design at Charles University, Czechoslovakia, from 1950 to 1951. It was the only kind of scholarship that was then available, and although the textile had little to do with his work at that time, Shakir accepted it because he was interested to learn “the feelings and thoughts of the artists in that small country in the heart of Europe after liberation.”¹⁸⁹ This experience must have contributed to his decision to return to Pakistan, as Czechoslovakia’s independence must have resonated to the establishment of Pakistan. Shakir’s time spent in Prague cultivated his intellect as he discovered the writings of Julius Fucik (a Czech Communist journalist) and the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, which had a profound effect on his work.

2.1 b. Shakir’s Arrival in Lahore (1952)

At the time of the establishment of Pakistan, Shakir was thirty-one years old and studying in London, but he received the news of the country’s founding while visiting Prague with his fellow students and attending the communist First Democratic Youth group. In his words, “I decided to become a Pakistani citizen, a citizen of the new

¹⁸⁹ Jan Marek. “Shakir Ali,” *New Orient*, 6:4(1967), 112.

independent state, which had been born that day (August 15, 1947); and I am quite proud to have been the first citizen of Pakistan to unfurl the Pakistan flag in Prague.”¹⁹⁰

During Partition as noted earlier millions of Muslims in colonial India were displaced and compelled to migrate to Pakistan in the bloody aftermath of the violence resulting from the hasty division of nation in 1947. However, Shakir’s deliberate decision to make Pakistan his home was not an imposed one, but one of his own choice, which was well-thought-out, and indicates a move both in terms of his physical “home” and also as a determining period in which he explores the parameters of his new identity as a Pakistani citizen. This shift in an artist’s return to his homeland after a sojourn in the West is a familiar refrain of the postwar/post independence histories of non-western modernism, as seen in parallel trends in Indonesia, Japan, and Africa. Not only is this indicative of Shakir’s “double consciousness” based on his lived experiences of pre-Partition India as well as the West. Shakir’s decision to return to Pakistan provided an exciting challenge that he confronted head on and in fact this enabled Shakir to negotiate skillfully the mandated rhetoric of a conservative Islamic state.¹⁹¹ Through his collaborations and networks with young artists like LAC’s members, Shakir’s early years in Lahore provided the momentum to usher in a modern movement that was distinct to the localized history of Pakistan.

¹⁹⁰ Marek, “Shakir Ali,” 112. It must be noted that the official date of independence on Pakistan was August 15, 1947, which was later in 1948 changed to August 14, 1947.

¹⁹¹ The whereabouts of Shakir’s family and their migration to Pakistan after Partition is not known. To common knowledge, Shakir had an elder sister who lived in Karachi but the rest of information is not available.

As a Muslim artist, Shakir must have understood the exciting opportunities to contribute towards the newly founded state of Pakistan, which is further reaffirmed by his succinct statement: “I realized fully well that Pakistan was a young state, which urgently needed its own artists, so I decided to return.”¹⁹² By the time he was ready to return to Pakistan, the year was 1951, four years after Partition, and he now was thirty-five years old, when he arrived with a Czech wife, and already settled to some degree into the lifestyle of Prague. By this time, he had completed his studies in textile design and lived in the Komensky College while making designs for a textile manufacturing company there.¹⁹³ Shakir must have also been acutely aware of the fact that he was the only Western-trained artist, who was returning to Pakistan. In India, there were only a few modern artists like Amrita Sher-Gil, who had been trained in Paris. Only later in the early 1950s did the PAG artists Syed Haider Raza, F. N. Souza, and S. K. Bakre would move to Paris, London, and the United States to continue their artistic practices. Shakir Ali continued to pursue an education that he had initiated in the West, not out of any reaction to the colonial or coerced by postcolonial trauma, but because of his sheer persistence to attain knowledge and to satisfy his restless search to explore the new. In 1951, when he returned to Pakistan, he was determined to identify with a new nation that he had never visited. Coming from a family with strong Indian nationalists, who were among the founders and leaders of the All-India Muslim League (Maulana Shaukat Ali Johar and

¹⁹² Marek, “Shakir Ali,” 113.

¹⁹³ Shakir was also offered a job as a textile designer in the company but he decided to return to Pakistan. Marek, “Shakir Ali,” 113.

Maulana Mohammad Ali Johar) may have also impacted his decision to be a Pakistani national.¹⁹⁴

Shakir first moved to Karachi, Pakistan and started teaching at the Parsi Virbaiji High School.¹⁹⁵ Initially, he was interested in finding a job as an art designer in a private firm in Pakistan, but because the art and trade had not developed at that time, Shakir quickly realized that he was primarily a painter, and therefore, painting would be the field in which he could best contribute to the new nation.¹⁹⁶ In 1952, Shakir moved to Lahore to accept a teaching position as a member of the painting faculty at the prestigious Mayo School of Arts Lahore (now NCA). This was a significant new beginning for his artistic career as this position enabled him to come into direct contact with the younger generations of Lahori artists.¹⁹⁷

In the previous chapter, this study had briefly described the struggles of the Pakistani government in establishing and reforming the infrastructure of the new governmental institutions, as well as settling and relocating refugees in the first decade of its establishment. Along with these other challenges, there was the unstable political situation in Pakistan, where the socio-political and cultural conditions were uncertain and

¹⁹⁴ In 1940s advanced graduate art education in India was not available and Shakir already had completed the formal training available in India at the J.J. School of Arts.

¹⁹⁵ Parsi Virbaiji High School was opened in 1859; initially only for the Parsi community, but in 1947 on Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah's request, due to scarcity of educational institutions, it was opened to all Muslim and non Parsi communities of Pakistan.
http://www.bvsparsischool.edu.pk/?page_id=54 (accessed on March 15, 2016).

¹⁹⁶ Marek, "Shakir Ali," 113.

¹⁹⁷ Shakir Ali's teaching position enabled him to secure an influential position in the art scene of Lahore. However, it must be kept in mind that Shakir met his younger cohorts at the Pak Tea House and Coffee House, which were located at the Mall Road Lahore and within walking distance from the Mayo School of Art.

tumultuous. The present was waiting to be written, and the colonial past rejected. However, even before the nation could establish any clear national rhetoric, the founder and the first president of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah died on September 11, 1948. His death was a massive psychological blow to the young nation and it created great anxiety and ambiguity in the leadership of political arena. During Jinnah's life, the main political party of Pakistan, the Muslim League, had already been turned into the personal business of influential landlord politicians. Their personal political interests created rivalries in provincial politics; hence, the democratic impulse that Jinnah espoused was left far behind. This chaos resulted in government instability for years to come. Partially because of this situation the government of Pakistan inclined toward the United States as an ally. The United State's role also manifested itself in the area of cultural diplomacy, and indirectly helped to shape the movements of modernism with both Shakir Ali and other LAC artists. Iftikhar Dadi points out that, "Unlike post - 1947 India, where Nehruvian socialism oriented itself toward national developmentalism and toward a nonaligned foreign policy (albeit with links to the soviet Union), the Pakistani establishment quickly moved to align the country with United States."¹⁹⁸ The alliance of the Pakistani government with the United States, which resulted in a crackdown on leftist inclined intellectuals in Pakistan, will be discussed in the next section.

¹⁹⁸ Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 94. For the United States, an alliance with Pakistan would give the U.S. army bases in the Indian Ocean, a crucial and strategic move at a juncture when the British presence in West Asia was at an all-time low. For details see Ayesha Jalal. *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* (Belknap Press, 2014), 75-88.

2.2 The Literary Circle of Lahore

As mentioned earlier, Lahore was cultural and social heart of Pakistan, because of its rich artistic, cultural, and political histories even prior to Partition. Since Shakir was a writer himself, an avid reader of eastern and western literature, upon his arrival in Lahore, he immediately connected with the local literary circle.¹⁹⁹ This literary circle consisted of eminent writers as Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984), Sibte Hasan (1916-1986), Abdulla Husain (1931-2015), Intizar Hussain (1923-2016), Hafeez Jalandhari (1900-1982), Sadat Hassan Manto (1912-1955), and Noon Meem Rashid (1910-1975). As indicated earlier there were two popular meeting places, the Pak Tea House and the Coffee House, which became hot spots for the progressive writers, poets, and artists. The two places hosted late night debates on literary, political, social, and current trends of the society.

During these years, the intelligentsia in Pakistan, whose members were inclined to Marxist theories, was in a precarious position since the Pakistani Communist party was tried for conspiring to overthrow the government during the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case of 1951.²⁰⁰ Although the Rawalpindi Conspiracy has a complex background, Jalal summarizes: “[I]t was the foiled coup attempt . . . , aimed at establishing a tyrannical military dictatorship with communist backing. What is undeniable is that the failure of

¹⁹⁹ Shakir wrote short stories in the Urdu magazine between 1939-41 and later essays on his own work and modern art. See Shakir Ali. Compiled by Sheema Majid. *Shakir Ali Ki Tehzairain* (Writings of Shakir Ali), (Pakistan National Council of the Arts, 1995).

²⁰⁰ Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, 80.

the coup was a golden opportunity for the new commander-in-chief to consolidate his position within the army.”²⁰¹

The accused included writers like Faiz Ahmed Faiz and artists like Syed Ali Imam. Faiz Ahmed Faiz was jailed for four years from 1951 to 1955. Faiz responded to his arrest by producing some of the finest resistance poetry to have come out of Pakistan.²⁰² Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s members of the leftist intelligentsia were either arrested or driven underground by the state through its combined tactics of ideological interpellation and patronage. These national crises became animating forces contributing to the rise of the non-political modern art.²⁰³ Because of the clear conflict between the government and people, artists did not produce nationalistic art, instead, they embraced “transnational modernisms.”²⁰⁴ The more oppressive social and political circumstances in the new country contributed toward artists and writers creative energies, as evidenced by Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Syed Ali Imam, an artist (who later became one of the founding members of LAC), who as a student at Gordon College Rawalpindi was part of the Communist Party from 1947-1951. He was on government’s radar as a Communist and considered a troublemaker. He was arrested twice in May 1949 and was jailed for

²⁰¹ Ibid.,81.

²⁰² Faiz Ahmed Faiz was the editor in chief of the *Pakistan Times* (newspaper), owned by a Communist sympathizer. See Jalal, *The struggle for Pakistan*. The All Pakistan Progressive Writers Association and the Communist Party of Pakistan were also banned in 1954. These events had a highly repressive effect on expression. Dadi, 95.

²⁰³ Ayesha Jalal in her book *The Struggle for Pakistan* considers the failure of the coup as a golden opportunity for the new commander-in-chief to consolidate his position within the army. It must be noted that Pakistan army always had a strong hold in Pakistan and Martial law was implemented f three times in Pakistan. The first one was in 1958 just following the circumstances above.

²⁰⁴ Dadi. *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 95.

several months. Upon his release he immediately went underground until 1951.²⁰⁵ Later, Syed Ali Imam turned away from the Communist party and focused on making and teaching art. Dadi notes, “The more overt repression of the leftist intelligentsia in Pakistan and an attenuated sense of [the] national in Pakistan lent further impetus to artists in embracing transnational modernism.”²⁰⁶

The Coffee House and the Pak Tea House were the centers of all kinds of discussions for artists and writers. But for artists and Communist-oriented intellectuals, Coffee House was the center for main meetings. Pakistani historian Khurshid Kamal Aziz (1927-2009) gives a detailed account in his book *The Coffee House of Lahore: A Memoir 1942-1957* on how the place changed hands, and in addition to names; *India Coffee House* became *The Coffee House of Lahore* after Partition. He notes, “[T]he Coffee House entertained more Leftists than I found at the Communist Party office on McLeod Road.”²⁰⁷ It was here that the young artists like Sheikh Safdar Ali, Syed Ali Imam, Moyene Najmi, Ahmed Parvez, and Anwar Jalal Shemza, would join in to listen to the debates and experiences of the senior writers and poets. Among these participants, Shakir Ali also shared his experience of living in the West and especially his involvement with the World Congress of Students in Prague, through which he was able to travel all over Czechoslovakia in the “Students Train for Peace.” Shakir was deeply moved by his visit

²⁰⁵ Marjorie Husain, *Ali Imam: Man of the Arts*, (Karachi: Foundation for Museum of Modern Art, 2003), 21-23.

²⁰⁶ Dadi. *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 97.

²⁰⁷ McLeod road is another road parallel and close by to the famous Mall road and had the Communist head office in Lahore. Khurshid Kamal Aziz, *The Coffee House of Lahore: A Memoir 1947-52*, (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2008), 23.

to Lidice (a village in the northwest of Prague) in 1947. The village had been completely destroyed in 1942 by Hitler in revenge for the death of his close ally Reinherd Heydrich (1904-1942).²⁰⁸ During his stay in Prague, Shakir did volunteer work in the city and was profoundly moved by the tragedy. He stated, “While doing this [volunteer work] I often thought how unconquerable is thought and human will-power. I knew that no-one [sic] could destroy the people’s determination to create a new and better world. And that the beauty of nature just as the creative ability of man, is eternal and will live forever.”²⁰⁹ This rich experiences in addition to being well versed in literature and trained both in eastern and western artistic practices must have had a lasting impact on Shakir and the young artists around him. He no doubt engaged these artists in debates on western modern art practices to stimulate them experiment and find new avenues in their artistic practices.

2.3 Shakir Ali and Lahore Art Circle

By the time Shakir Ali became actively engaged in the artistic and literary circles of Lahore, an appreciation for modern in art had already started to manifest itself in the form of the new subject matter comprising contemporary life, even in the works of traditionalist pre-Partition senior artists. Abdur Rahman Chughtai’s *College Girls* (figure 1.11), and *Hostel Girls* (figure 1.12), although modern themes, were still rendered in his signature Mughal-Persian style, thus, conforming to an Islamic nationalist rhetoric. On

²⁰⁸ 30,000 people were killed and the village was completely destroyed. <http://www.lidice-memorial.cz/en/>

²⁰⁹ Marek, *Shakir Ali*, 113.

the other hand, Allah Bux established his individuality as an artist—and his idea of modernism—and continued to practice in the European academic style, which represented an Orientalist view reminiscent of the colonial era. Zubeida Agha was the first Pakistani artist to introduce the syntax of western abstraction in Pakistan. In addition, Shakir's return to Pakistan in 1951, sparked new artistic experimentation in Pakistan.

Inspired by Shakir's views about modern art which he believed to be a combination of play of line color and form employed to express a mood rather than a story, a group of five young artists including Sheikh Safdar Ali (1924-1983), Syed Ali Imam (1924-2002), Moyene Najmi (1926-1997), Ahmed Parvez (1926-1979), and Anwar Jalal Shemza (1928 -1985) founded LAC in 1952. Later, a number of other young artists such as Razia Ferroz (1928- 1987), Mariam Habib (1929-2002), Ijaz ul Hassan (b.1940), Raheel Akbar Javeed (1939-1985), Hanif Ramay (1930-2006), and Qutab Sheikh (1934-2006), also joined the group. This study, however, is only focusing on the founding members of LAC, which coincidentally only includes the male artists in this group, since Mariam Habib and Razia Feroz joined LAC later in 1955.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ The choice of not including Mariam Habib and Razia Ferroz is due to the fact that both women were not part of the Pak Tea and Coffee House culture and by mid 50s they had not produced many art works. In addition, both artists were trained at the University of the Punjab under the tutelage of Anna Molka, therefore, their art practice was aligned with their mentor's social realism, which was quite different from the other LAC members. It is noteworthy however, that after getting married, Mariam Habib more actively supported LAC by writing exhibitions reviews in the 1960s, which played a vital role in their exposure.

In the beginning of this chapter Safdar Mir's statement calls these young artists as "iconoclasts and mad".²¹¹ Because they deviated from the norm and refused to continue to practice art form prevalent at that time, the style they had been previously taught. The young artists' rebellious attitudes in not following the tradition and trajectory of Chughtai or European academic painting represented an important break. Their intention to find a unique and individual style was probably considered a mad dream because the idea of an artist creating something solely for his or her own satisfaction, rather than making beautiful paintings to please the public, was completely new in postcolonial society of Pakistan. This attitude surpassed any of the existent norms and was not easy to accept in a traditional society. But at the same time, this newfound resistance was a gift of the freedom that had been bestowed upon the people of Pakistan. Safdar Mir further elaborates on the need to founding LAC and the reason why it had to go against prevalent art practices:

[T]he young Pakistani artists felt that what they had inherited from their past was too static, self-satisfied, smug, non-violent, and vegetarian. The colors washed too often and gave an impression of bleaching. The lines melodious, sugary, cloying, velvety, flowing, and metaphysically inane [sic]. The art of painting expressed none of the conflicts and tensions of a vigorous community facing the challenges of the post-war world.²¹²

The young artists considered the prevalent art practices stale and static because they were either confined to mimetic representation or romantic and allegorical views of the glorious past of Muslims that was limited and could not address a wider audience across the globe. Furthermore, the idea of producing an art of pretty pictures in the

²¹¹ Mir, "Shakir Ali: Painters' Painter," 3.

²¹² Ibid., 4.

traditional painting practices during such a time of chaos, unrest, and anxiety for the future seemed out of place and unreal. For them, the real task was not to recall the past but to move the art practices in Pakistan towards a progressive direction compatible with the rest of the world. Another Pakistani art critic and scholar of English literature, Akbar Naqvi further confirms the conditions that fostered the founding of LAC and notes:

The Lahore Art Circle came into being because the young artists wanted freedom to breathe and to do things beyond the range of Anna Molka, Abdur Rehman Chughtai, and Allah Bux, the three icons of Lahore's art establishment. They wanted to go modern whether anyone liked it or not.²¹³

Since Zubeida Agha's 1949 exhibition of modern art in Karachi faced harsh criticism (which has been discussed in Chapter 1), LAC artists were aware that they would face hostility when displaying their work, as the general public had no exposure to modern art. In the statement above Naqvi points to "the young artist wanted freedom to breathe," similar to Rabindranath Tagore's observation that: "modern means freedom of mind."²¹⁴ The young artists must have understood the fact that there was little joy in continuing what already was an established practice. The traditional skill of Indian miniature painting, for example, involved the practice of meticulously painting by copying images over and over again in order to reinforce the artist's skill but not his or her creativity. In times like this, when the young artists were struggling to find an outlet and look outwards, Shakir became a source of inspiration for them. In his own subtle way, Shakir mentored the young artists of Pakistan who were desperately seeking new

²¹³ Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 270.

²¹⁴ See chapter 1, footnote 103.

trajectories in the visual arts. Syed Ali Imam, one of LAC founding members states:

Shakir has not only influenced but subtly guided painters like Shemza, Ahmed Parvez, Safdar, Moyene Najmi, myself, and many others by his views and philosophical discourses on modern art. . . . Being shy, quiet and introvert[ed], he shunned self-publicity and was reluctant to have exhibitions of his works, although he enjoyed discussing his work with his younger contemporaries. He showed discretion in showing choosing amongst friends, painters and writers. . . . His passion for [the] history of art made him wade seriously through different art periods from caveman's paintings to present-day schools of art with great perception.²¹⁵

Being an avid reader and having an interest in writing, Shakir contributed several articles to local newspapers and magazines before and after Partition. The only difference was that before Partition he was writing fiction and afterward his contributions were more educational and critical. He wrote articles to educate the Pakistani public about art history from around the world. Among his articles were *Mera Fun* (My Art), *Atalvi Musavvari* (Painting in Italy), *Jadid Musavvari ke Rujhanaat* (Modern Trends in Painting), and *Behzad Ke Naam* (To Behzad).²¹⁶ Without undermining his fellow artists, Shakir gave them hints of instruction that is further discussed in Chapter 3. Pakistani art critic S. Amjad Ali highlights the impact of LAC and its importance for writers no doubt alluding to Shakir among others, "It was with the rise of Lahore Art Circle, that there was seen movement and excitement in the art world. The people and press responded with éclat."²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Quoted by Ali Imam in Husain. *Ali Imam: Man of The Arts.*, 47- 48.

²¹⁶ Shakir Ali, *Shakir Ali Ki Tehrairain* (Writings of Shakir Ali), compiled by Sheema Majid Pakistan National Council of the Arts, 1995.

²¹⁷ Syed Amjad Ali, "Forward Looking Art: Years Before and After Independence," *50 Years of Pakistan*, 32 (Special Volume, year 1997): 35.

In past scholarship on the history of Pakistani modern art, Shakir Ali has always been considered a tacit leader of the group without being involved in the activities of the art circle. This approach may be due to the fact that Shakir never showed his work in the number of LAC exhibitions.²¹⁸ The reason for doing so is unknown, but he exhibited his work along the other artists of Pakistan in the exhibitions of 1954 and 1956 curated by Anna Molka in the Department of Fine Arts sponsored shows at the University of the Punjab, Lahore.²¹⁹ This study highlights the fact that Shakir Ali was not only an active participant of the group but also its catalyst. Being the senior artist in the group with extensive experience, exposure, well versed in eastern and western art as well as literature, Shakir actually led the group. He provided his books, personal insights on the works of his fellow artists and encouraged them to further explore the medium of painting while being aware of the world outside Pakistan. His work formed the canopy of the camp for which the other five members provided the supporting pillars.

LAC members held regular meetings in which they discussed and planned future strategies to push the group forward into the mainstream international art scene. Documentation of the actual meetings of LAC is difficult to find in archives and private collections; however, during the field research for this study, one set of minutes for LAC meeting held on September 17, 1958, was discovered. The meeting minutes have not

²¹⁸ As a group LAC held four exhibitions between 1952-58, in which they exhibited their works in pairs and groups of three and six, but never all of them together.

²¹⁹ Punjab University Exhibition Catalog 1954, including Shakir Ali, Ali Imam, Moyene Najmi, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Safdar Ali, Ahmed Parvez, Mariam Habib, Allah Bux and Abdur Rahman Chughtai. In this exhibition, Moyene Najmi won the University Shield of men's "Best Painter". A second exhibition was the Punjab University Exhibition of 1956 in which Safdar Ali, Shakir Ali, Ali Imam, Moyene Najmi, Razia Ferroz, and Mariam Shah participated and Ali Imam won the shield of men's "Best Painter," University Shield. There were separate categories for men and women "Best Painter".

been published and are being brought to light through this dissertation.²²⁰ Since it is a rare and pivotal primary documentation of LAC for this study, it has been reproduced below and the copy of the original document is attached as Appendix 1. Remarkably, the minutes were recorded in English.

**Minutes of the Meeting of The Lahore Art Circle Held on 17-9-1958
At 5.30 p.m. at 4 Lake Road**

Present: Mrs. Hassan Habib
Mr. Shakir Ali
Mr. Moyene Najmi
Mr. Safdar Ali
Honorary Secretary, Lahore Art Circle

- I. Mr. Shakir Ali informed that the American Friends of the Middle-East which now had an office in Karachi had obtained a good building and had reserved a gallery for the permanent sale and display of paintings of Pakistan Artists. The Association would be glad to receive paintings from artists for this purpose. There are no charges or commission except that the Artists should arrange for the transport of their paintings. Mr. Shakir Ali promised to send a copy of the letter received from the Association to the Honorary Secretary, Lahore Art Circle.
- II. The Following program for [the] coming Winter season was decided:-
 - (a) Exhibition by the Lahore Art Circle in Alhamra - Nov. 5 - (3rd or 4th Week). The members of the Lahore Art Circle will be participating Artists. Each Artist will exhibit 8 paintings.
 - (b) The Lahore Art Circle will also send paintings by its member Artists for the National Art Exhibition at Karachi to be held sometime in the end of Dec. 58. It is expected that the Pakistan

²²⁰ The document was retrieved on March 24, 2015, from Sheikh Safdar Ali's personal archive that is currently in the custody of his son Nasir Ali residing in Houston, TX.

Art Council Karachi will address organizations in Lahore for this purpose.

- III. The Next meeting of the Lahore Art Circle will be held on 20th October, 1958 at 4 Lake Road at 5p.m.

Honorary Secretary,

Lahore Art Circle, Lahore

These minutes clearly demonstrate that the group followed an organized agenda, indicative that it was well structured and suggestive of there being some kind of manifesto, which has unfortunately not come to light. It may have been an oral manifesto rather than a written one unlike PAG. More research, therefore, is needed to explore and uncover its agenda. Up to this point, none of the exhibition reviews or articles from the 1950s on LAC exhibitions give any specific information regarding a manifesto, (unlike PAG, for which Souza wrote the manifesto that was published in the catalog of the first exhibition of the group held in Baroda in 1949).²²¹ The meeting minutes indicate Shakir Ali was the leader of the group and the point person for all kinds of correspondence within and outside the group. The meeting minutes are from 1958, by this time, three of the six LAC members (Syed Ali Imam, Anwar Jalal Shemza, and Ahmed Parvez), had already moved to Europe to study and establish international careers as artists. However, Shakir Ali continued to mentor and lead the group in order to foster new talent. The first point of the meeting identifies LAC's involvement with the agency called the "American

²²¹ Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art*, 43.

Friends of the Middle-East.” It looks like one of the agency’s goals was to support LAC artists and their works by providing a space for the artists in the city Karachi. One might wonder, what was the purpose of the American Friends of the Middle-East? and Why were they involved with LAC when the relationship involved no monetary benefit? Why was it willing to promote LAC in Karachi, far from Lahore, a city not producing exciting art at the time? There are no easy answers to these questions and a more in-depth study is needed and in fact, these questions raise more concerns. Hugh Wilford, scholar of U.S. History describes the American Friends of the Middle-East;

[S]hortly after its establishment in 1947, the CIA had begun secretly channeling US government funds via pass-through foundations to apparently private organizations of American citizens in an effort to counter similar “front” operations already being run by the Soviet Union. The recipients of these covert subsidies included literary intellectuals, labor leaders, students – and a pro-Arab, anti-Zionist organization founded in 1951 called the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME).²²²

Furthermore, Eva Cockcroft in her essay “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of Cold War,” has analyzed the strategies of the CIA and the Museum of Modern Art’s involvement in promoting Abstract Expressionism throughout the world after World War II. She emphasizes:

[L]inks between the cultural cold war politics and the success of Abstract Expressionism was neither coincidental nor unnoticeable. CIA’s purpose in supporting international intellectual and cultural activities was to espionage or establishing contact with leading foreign intellectuals. CIA to sought to influence the foreign intellectual community and to present a strong propaganda image of the United States as a “free” society as opposed to the “regimented” communist

²²² Hugh Wilford. “American Friends of the Middle East: The CIA, US Citizens and the Secret Battle for American Public Opinion in the Arab-Israel Conflict, 1947-1967,” *Journal of American Studies*, (Cambridge University Press and British Association of American Studies, 2015), http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0021875815001255 (accessed on Marc 30, 2016).

bloc.²²³

The American Friends of Middle East was evidently part of this program. In order to further support this notion, another unclassified document was recovered from the National Archives of the United States, which is attached as an Appendix 2. The following is a summary of an excerpt that provides a glimpse of United States foreign policy for Pakistan in its formative years.²²⁴ The document title “Country Plan,” lays out the United States agenda to convince Pakistan that Soviet - Chinese Communist imperialism is a serious threat to the sovereignty of Pakistan and its surrounding countries. Pakistan must align itself with the United States because of its leadership among the free nations of the world. Further, that the Soviet-Chinese communist economic system is based on slavery and does not offer material and spiritual advancement to the common man. However, because of its democratic system, the United States, offers opportunities to minority groups, stimulating the belief that the people of the Middle East and South Asia on the one hand, and the Americans on the other, are equal and introducing, as required, the belief that the United States working within the context of global problems and responsibilities, tries to support the just settlements of all international disputes.²²⁵

²²³ Eva Crockfort. “Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War,” *Artforum*, 15:10 (1974), 42-43.

²²⁴ National Archive Maryland, (Record Identification P. 75, Country Files: 1951-1959, Box No. 1-2 (Stack area 490, Row # 42, Compartment 16 and shelf No. 7)

²²⁵ National Archive Maryland, (Record Identification P. 75, Country Files: 1951-1959, Box No. 1-2 (Stack area 490, Row # 42, Compartment 16 and shelf No. 7)

Summary of this excerpt indicates U.S. interest in Pakistan including its intervention in the country's modern art. In consideration of this political agenda, it is of great importance to note that LAC members were leftists and, at the same time, prone to receiving U.S. favors. Most likely the U. S. wanted to affiliate with these artists precisely because they were leftist. Such endorsement would lend their radical views by subsuming them under the U.S.'s liberal auspices and would thereby enhance the United State as truly open to dissenting views and therefore, eminently democratic and sure of itself. Members like Shakir had an established reputation of being a socialist leftist, even from his student days in Prague. This notion is further discussed in chapter 3 where an analysis of LAC exhibition record and United States Information Center Murree's role in promoting LAC is provided. Besides the involvement of agencies in the support of the modern art of Pakistan, it is important to step back and analyze the need for the LAC's formation.

Why Form LAC?

While discussing the founding of LAC, it is important to understand why artists collectively form a group. The questions to consider address the need, importance, and implications of forming an Art Circle. What purpose does it serve? What is its impact on a newly established society? Does this give the works of art more validity or credibility if produced by a large number of individual forming a school or group or establishes a movement? To begin to answer the questions it is useful to look at art historian Michael Leja's analysis of the New York School, and the way he defines "collectivity" and group "identity" in his book, *The Formation of an Avant-Garde in New York*, since it provides

insight into how another group of artist like LAC band together to achieve common goals:

Different sorts of claims have tended to run together in establishing group identity, claims of three general types. First, evidence may be offered of significant social contact among the artists, who are shown to have worked together or met regularly. They may also have acknowledged the common aesthetic commitment and beliefs and have striven to exhibit together. A second alternative focus is on similarities of style and /or subject matter, similarities not necessarily recognized by the artists themselves. Third, ideological congruencies may be the grounds of a perceived unity, even if those congruencies are largely a matter of what the artists agreed on opposing (an academic, for instance or a prevailing set of beliefs and theories.²²⁶

The conditions that Leja lays out for the New York school may very well be applied to the LAC because Leja's definitions of what can constitute a group matches a number of the social conditions and ideological concerns of LAC. The members of LAC met regularly and they shared common beliefs in various issues of aesthetics as well as the need to explore the medium of painting to invent a new idiom. They agreed on breaking away from most of the previous trends in Pakistani art including shifting from naturalistic, idealized, and romanticized painting approaches, not only in terms of their media but also in subject matter. During an exciting time of social and political chaos, these young artists felt the need to create a platform for the exchange of ideas and knowledge that would encourage critical thinking, debate, and discussion on various matters of art and politics. The group provided a support system of assurances to each other in a time when there was a scarcity of exhibition venues, galleries, viewers, and constructive criticism. Because Sheikh Safdar Ali had been a member of a group in pre-

²²⁶ Michael Leja. *Reforming Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in 1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 19.

partition India, between 1944 and 1946 called “The Muslim Art Sketch Club,” he was able to remind his fellow LAC members of the great benefits of group solidarity and shared goals.²²⁷ Through the analysis of the works of art, Chapter 3 will demonstrate that, although the members of LAC developed and worked in diverse styles, there were a number of underlying goals common between them. The artists developed a productive dialogue through their work. If one artist presented an idea of exploring a certain subject matter, the rest would reflect upon it in individual ways. Ideas were continuously reflected and refracted between the members, thus developing a discourse on various issues of abstraction, stylization, and aesthetics.

Shakir’s colorful and dynamic personality, which was shaped by the experiences of two entirely different cultures and their aesthetic outlook makes him a liminal figure in reference to Bhabha’s theory of a third space, which creates a voice that does not completely belong to either one culture or the other but exist somewhere in the middle. In other words, Shakir becomes the bridge that connects the colonial past to the postcolonial present. His first hand experiences of the two worlds that provide him with the double consciousness enabled him to deviate from established norms. This included Shakir twice marrying western women (first a Czech and second a British woman), and painting what he wished to paint in an original hybrid manner, so different from everything around in addition to his highly intellectual conversation. This must have stood out in the

²²⁷ Safdar along his artist friends formed “The Muslim Art Sketch Club,” which was joined by many young commercial artists including M. F Husain. See Anna Molka, “Sheikh Safdar,” *Monograph Number Seven*, (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 1957), 10.

intellectual circles and inspired the rebellion young artists for whom he served as a role model.

The next section of this study proposes that the founding of LAC was based on the model of PAG, the ways in which their modern movement in India served as a paradigm shift, similarly it was followed by LAC in Pakistan. A comparative study between the two groups is provided in section 2.3 b to identify the similarities and differences between the two modern movements in India and Pakistan, which are affected by the similar social and political conditions. Rather than looking at each individual artists' work, their comparative study of the two groups analyzes the broader aspects and the over arching impact of the two on the art of India and Pakistan respectively. On the basis of these direct comparisons, a possible manifesto for LAC can be inferred.

2.4 Progressive Artists Group (PAG): Model for Lahore Art Circle (LAC)

This dissertation proposes that LAC, comprised of the prolific young painters in Pakistan, was formulated after the model of PAG. Although no formal, written manifesto has been discovered for LAC, this research suggests that its rhetoric and agenda was similar to PAG. The argument is based on multiple factors. Both groups were founded in postcolonial times and have similarities in their approaches that are reflected through their works (and other social and political dynamics), which is made apparent in the comparative table between the two groups. In addition, there was a close connection between members of LAC and PAG. Syed Haider Raza, a member of PAG, was the elder brother of Syed Imam Ali, a member of LAC. Syed Haider Raza remained in India

at the time of Partition, while Syed Ali Imam migrated to Pakistan in 1947. The two brothers remained in touch with each other via letters and phone calls. The relationship of the two is not a well-known fact in Pakistan, and it has not been explored in previous scholarships on either side of the border.²²⁸ It is also highly possible that Akbar Padamsee (a PAG member) and Shakir crossed paths working at André Lhote's studio in Paris between 1950 and 1951. Sheikh Safdar Ali, a member of LAC, was a friend of Maqbool Fida Husain when they both worked for Bombay Talkies, designing film sets in the city. They were also part of the Muslim Club in those days.²²⁹ In 1970s, Maqbool Fida Husain and Frances Newton Souza visited Karachi several times and held exhibitions at Indus Gallery, which was owned by Syed Ali Imam. This indicates that they must have been in contact with each other in yesteryears. Based on the argument presented above, it is important to introduce the formation of PAG in order to appreciate its role as a model for the founding of LAC and its functions, especially because there are no other documents for understanding LAC's function.

Progressive Art Group (PAG)

Today we paint with absolute freedom for content and techniques almost anarchic; save that we are governed by one or two sound elemental, and eternal

²²⁸ None of the Pakistani scholars have established the relationship between the two brothers in their scholarship, most probably because Syed Haider Raza never visited Pakistan and Syed Ali Imam never returned to India. During this research, the author of this study had difficulty establishing the fact through credible sources and indeed, Ali Imam's wife Mrs. Shehnaz Imam confirmed the close relationship and exchange of phone calls, letters and cards between the two brothers. Author's interview with Mrs. Ali Imam in Karachi, January 2015.

²²⁹ Author's interview with Mrs. Ali Imam in Karachi, January 2015. Author was unable to verify and find any other information about "The Muslim Art Sketch Club," and its other members.

laws, of aesthetic order, plastic co-ordination, and color composition [sic]. We have no pretensions of making vapid revivals of any school or movement in art. We have studied the various schools of paintings and sculpture and arrive at a vigorous synthesis.²³⁰

In the new postcolonial and secular nation-state of India, PAG drafted a manifesto, indicating the group was not united by a style, medium, or aesthetic principles, but by the common goal of artistic "freedom." The hallmark of PAG was its emphasis on developing individual styles within the group while embracing the modern language of western art movements. On the evening of August 14, 1947, the Progressive Artists' Group (PAG), the first formal art group of post-colonial India, was founded in Bombay.²³¹ The six founding artists of the group included Krishna Hawlji Ara (1914-1985), Sadanand K. Bakre (1920-2007), Hari Ambadas Gade (1917-2001), Maqbool Fida Husain (1915-2011), Syed Haider Raza (1922), and Francis Newton Souza (1924-2002). All of the artists came together in Bombay from different religious and social backgrounds in India, for instance, Syed Haider Raza and Maqbool Fida Husain were Muslims; K. H. Ara, was an untouchable Dalit Hindu; and F. N. Souza comes from a devout Christian family. The group was founded as a reaction to the prevalent artistic practices of European realist academic training as well as the nationalist Bengal School art movement of British India. In contrast to the nationalist agenda of the Bengal School (*Bharat Mata*, figure 1. 3), which reverted back to traditional Indian painting, PAG wanted to adapt a secularist approach and embrace modernist trends prevalent in the

²³⁰ F. N. Souza quoted it in the catalog of PAG exhibition held on July 7th, 1949. It was quoted by Dalmia, in *The Making of Modern Indian Art*, 43.

²³¹ Dalmia states that the group was formed on the evening of August 14, 1947. Dalmia. *The Making of Modern Indian Art*, 42.

West, non-religious and not commissioned work, free of the constraints of form and subject. For Example; Frances Newton Souza's cubist and post impressionist *Untitled* (figure 2.3), Syed Haider Raza's post-Impressionist style *Landscape* (figure 2.4), from 1945, and K.H. Ara's post impressionist *Untitled* (figure 2.5) from 1943 are all individualistic and distinct from each other, and thus diversely show that PAG members were not looking at any one particular art movement in the West but were inspired in general by the European movements of Abstraction, Cubism, Expressionism, Impressionism, and post- Impressionism. Therefore, each member had enough choice to develop an individual style in painting. None of PAG artists at that time had any first-hand exposure to western art. They were provided access to books and color reproductions of classical and modern European paintings by the businessman and patron Emanuel Schlesinger (1896-1968) and Walter Langhammer (1905-1977), an art teacher and art critic who later became art director at the *Times of India*, as well as by Rudolf von Leyden (1908-1983), who was an art critic for *The Times of India*. The three supported and helped PAG financially as well. Sunday morning salons, hosted by Langhammer, opened the world hitherto unknown to these artists, who hailed from small towns.²³² PAG was also accused of getting support from "three foreigners," including Rudy Von Leyden, Walter Langhammer, and E. Schlesinger.²³³ The young PAG artists did receive support from these influential foreign critics', which actually encouraged the artists to continue doing what they believed were the next step towards being part of an international art

²³² Gayatari Rangachari Shah "Not Just Modern Art, but Indian," *The New York Times*, March 3, 2011.

²³³ Chaitanya Sambrani. "The Progressive Arts' Group," in *Indian Art: an Overview*, ed. Gayatri Sinha (India: Rupa & Co., 2003),102.

scene. This support came in the form of patronage, favorable articles, and reviews of the artists' modern approach in making art very different from the prevalent practices in the fine arts of India. Von Leyden reviewed their exhibition held in Bombay in 1949 and validated the efforts of the PAG.²³⁴ According to Leyden:

The six artists, Ara, sculptor Bakre, Gade, Husain, Raza and Souza (generally known as Newton) have formed a distinct group in spite of their very different artistic approaches and tempers. They are not satisfied with the ready-made convention either of the academic western or the academic traditional schools. In the words of Samuel Butler, which they have been set as a motto over the exhibition, "young art must be working out its own salvation from efforts in all fear and trembling." It can also not be said that they have simply exchanged the conventions of the old schools for the obscure code of modern painting. Those who have followed the works of these artists over the past years will know of the struggles, the experiments, the trials that lie behind the considerable achievement, which this exhibition represents.²³⁵

F. N Souza, a devout Catholic from Goa was the spokesman for PAG. As the group explored their own languages of modernism inspired by the western art movements, their work met hostility not only from members of the general public but also from compatriot artists. Even senior artists like Madhav Satwalekar (1915-2006) considered modern painting to be an act of "primitives and cave man."²³⁶ Because of the colors, exploration of texture, abstract forms, broad, bold, swooping brushstrokes- all against the grain of academic style of painting, their work was not easily acceptable by the general public.

²³⁴ Dr. Hermann Goetz, Director of the Museum and Picture Gallery held the first PAG exhibition in Baroda 1949 . It was the same exhibition that was shown shortly afterward in Bombay. While working at Express Block Studio at Sir P.M Road (Bombay), Raza made two paintings of street scenes, which were shown at Bombay Art Society Exhibitions. Rudi Von Leydon published a review in *The Times of India*, praising Raza's work. Walter Langhammer followed up on the review and published another review in favor of Raza's work. Dalmia, *The Making of Modern India*,143.

²³⁵ Rudy Von Leydon, "Artists Exhibition in Bombay: Distinct Group," *The Times of India*, July 9, 1949. Quoted by Dalmia, in *The Making of Modern India*, 46.

²³⁶ Dalmia, *The Making of Modern India*, 45.

It must be noted that PAG's founding date, August 14, 1947, is significant because the group refuted the reality of Partition by declaring a secularist manifesto. The fact that members of PAG came from different religious backgrounds was a strong statement suggesting that this gathering of artists was a microcosmic of the new secular India. Art historian Chaitanya Sambrani has emphasized the diversity of the group and he states: "[T]he social and economic backgrounds of the six artists gave importance to their bid for the universalized modernism in the context of the newly-independent, secular socialist republic with emancipation, egalitarianism and modernization on its policy agenda."²³⁷

There were several solo shows that were held in India by the members of PAG in various cities to promote modern art.²³⁸ The original core of PAG began to weaken by late 1949, as some of its members moved to Europe.²³⁹

²³⁷ Sambrani. "Progressive Artists Group." 104.

²³⁸ See Dalmia *The Making of Modern India*, 265-293.

²³⁹ F. N. Souza left for London. In 1950, S. Haider Raza went to Paris and S. K. Bakre followed Souza to London. Other younger artists joined the PAG in the next few years but the Group finally broke down in the mid 1950s. Beth Citron, "Contemporary Art in Bombay, 1965-1995" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2009), 8-9.

Comparison Between LAC and Bombay Progressive

Progressive Art Group (1947-50)	Lahore Art Circle (1952-58)
1. Formed on August 14,1947.	1. Formed in 1952.
2. Progressive Artist’s Group, also known as Bombay Progressive Artists Group- founded on the name of city.	2. Lahore Art Circle – also founded in the name of city.
3. It was founded as a reaction to adherence to European academic realism (Ravi Varma), and traditionalist - nationalist (Bengal School) - the mainspring of colonial art policy in India.	3. It was founded as a reaction to adherence to European academic realism (Ustad Allah Bux) and anti Hindu nationalism producing Mughal-Persian style (Abdur Rahman Chughtai), the mainspring of colonial art policy in India.
4. An effort to gain freedom of expression.	4. An effort to gain freedom of expression.
5. The early meetings of PAG were held in the office of “The Friends of the Soviet Union at Girgaum Bombay.”	5. LAC was also in contact with “The American Friends of the Middle-East.” Evidence found in the meeting minutes of LAC from Sep 17, 1958.
6. PAG examples were in Paris, Munich, New York, and London. None of PAG members were directly exposed to the western art movements but they were supported and encouraged by Rudi Von Leydon, Walter Langhammer and E. Schlesinger. PAG members exposure to western art movements was through books and especially exhibition catalogs. the famous one held in Calcutta in 1922 which included artists such as, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, and Johannes Itten, Uma Prasad Mookerjee, Shanta Devi and Gaganendranath Tagore were also featured with the western modern artists.	6. LAC members also drew upon various art movements including those in Paris, Munich, New York, and London. However, their exposure to the western art was through Shakir Ali. The presence of figures like the American sculptor and art educationist, Mark Sponenburgh (1912-2002), Principal of Mayo School of Arts from 1958-1961, must have also contributed towards the exposure of western art to LAC members. However, no direct connection of Sponenburgh with LAC was found. LAC members also had access to print media, through the books and catalogs on western art exhibitions, which they borrowed from British Library in Lahore.

<p>7. PAG was the first formal group on the Indian side of the border at the time of Partition which redefined yet another wave of modern art with its antecedents in various western art movements.</p>	<p>7. LAC was the first artist group that played a pivotal role in furthering the modern art movement in the first decade of Pakistan's establishment. Before LAC members, Zubeida Agha was the first individual to introduce abstract art in Pakistan through her 1949 exhibition in Karachi. Abdur Rahman Chughtai utilized the modern life in Pakistan after Partition as his subject matter to deviate from his previous nostalgic Muslim themes.</p>
<p>8. PAG members had diverse stylistic expressions as they searched for a significant unique form in art—each artist taking on his own direction.</p>	<p>8. LA members had diverse stylistic expressions as they searched for a significant unique form in art—each artist taking on his own direction.</p>
<p>9. PAG was in close association with the Progressive Writers of Bombay.</p>	<p>9. LAC members were closely associated with the Lahore Literary Circle. In fact, Shakir Ali, and Ali Imam, and A. J. Shemza, were writers.</p>
<p>10. PAG in its naming called upon the liberal ideas, or implementing reforms to existent ideas.</p>	<p>10. LAC members' meetings at the Pak Tea House and the Coffee House were a progressive move to find a public place to discuss and reflect on new ideas of modernism.</p>

2.5 Possible Manifesto of LAC Artists

Although no written manifesto for LAC has been found, in light of this group's meeting in 1958, the close comparative study of the two groups above, and the undertaking of the analysis of the works of LAC members in Chapter 3, a possible manifesto of LAC if it was written or is found would uphold the following tenets:

1. Break away from the existent traditional art practices in Pakistan
2. Invent/explore a new language in art
3. Establish themselves as contemporaries with the international art scene.
4. Produce art for art's sake and not be part of any nationalistic agenda.

Later, in 1958, three of the six LAC members including Ali Imam, Ahmed Parvez, and Anwar Jalal Shemza, moved to London. With two other artists from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) Safiudin Ahmed (1922-2012) and Bashir Mirza (1941-2000), five of them together formed another group called the *Pakistan Group London: Five Modern Painters*. They formulated a written manifesto that states, "the aim for the formation of the group is; to introduce Pakistani contemporary artists in the West and to provide them opportunities and projection."²⁴⁰ The manifesto above seems to be a continuation of the earlier LAC one that the author of this study has proposed.

Summary

One of the first Pakistani modernist artist to study in the Slade School of Arts London and work under Andre Lhote was Shakir Ali, whose radical works of abstraction

²⁴⁰ This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4

provided an exciting and new visual language for the young artists who came in contact with him when he moved to Lahore in 1952. His long-lasting intellectual impact resulted in the formation of the LAC, and as this study contends, Shakir Ali's influential role as an artist and mentor must be closely examined in order to understand the formation of Pakistani modernism. Based on the similar social and political conditions, and the close connection of LAC to PAG, this study asserts that PAG was a model for LAC, and also provided a possible manifesto for LAC to document and thus better understand the group's aims in the formative years of Pakistan.

Chapter 3

Lahore Art Circle: Paradigm Shift

The previous chapter provides a brief overview of Shakir Ali's biography in conjunction with his catalyzing role in the founding of LAC and discusses the social, political and artistic conditions that led to the founding of LAC. Based on the similarities between PAG and LAC, the former group presents itself as a suitable model for the latter. An analysis of the group also lends to the conceptualization of a possible manifesto for LAC.

This chapter discusses the works of LAC in addition to other factors that shaped the modern art in Pakistan during its formative years. It is divided into three sections. *Section I* briefly addresses the biographies of the artists in reference to postcolonial discourse. This perspective is appropriate as LAC artists lived and worked through the colonial to postcolonial times and aspects of postcolonial discourse are inherently embedded in their early lives and educational backgrounds. *Section II* gives an account of exhibition venues while highlighting the role of the United States Information Center (USIC), Murree, in supporting LAC members by providing them exhibition space for showing their modern work among the general public. *Section III* addresses the earlier works of LAC artists produced before the group's founding and then proceeds to analyze their paintings after its formal establishment.

Modernism, in the context of Pakistani art, did not follow a strict chronological progression. Rather, political and social conditions produced possibilities, inconsistencies, disruptions and jumps in its development. For example, urban life in Pakistan became a popular subject through which Abdur Rahman Chughtai explored modern themes in his unique innovative style of traditional Mughal-Persian painting, *College Girls* (figure 1.11). Similarly, Anna Molka Ahmed's works of social realism in impressionistic style (figure 1.13) offered another kind of modernism that was simultaneously existent in Pakistan. However, the modernism of this generation of artists is another debate, which can be explored another time. Likewise, the work of LAC members did not hold to a neat order that would guide and define the fashion that its adherents were following in terms of subject matter, style and technique. A continuous shift between still life, figurative and landscape painting, among the members, sometimes alternated between realistic, abstract, and semi-abstract subjects. LAC was modern because its artists did not conform to molds of traditional orientalist (Mughal-Persian), decorative, ornamental or a European naturalistic academic style of painting prevalent in Pakistan. Artists like Shemza and Shakir, who were well versed in the Bengal School, may have easily established themselves in the international art scene by following the traditional styles as that would have nicely fill in the preconceived expectations of the non-western artists in the West.²⁴¹ But LAC artists wished instead to explore their individual interests in alternative styles, subjects, and techniques through adopting a range of idioms that were both modern and germane to Pakistan. Hence, this study will

²⁴¹ Chughtai already had established a market and had become the face of a "national artist of Pakistan."

propose that the modernism LAC invented was heuristic —one that continuously evolved with experimentation. Their continuous shifts between various generalized sensibilities inspired by western modern art movements and trends such as Cubism, Post-impressionism, Abstraction, Surrealism, and De Stijl represented their concerted bid to be considered modern Pakistani artists. LAC's formative years were particularly important because the artists not only experimented, explored and evolved in their individual styles, but they also redefined the field of fine arts in Pakistan by opening it to new ideas and genres.

In this chapter, a comparative analysis of LAC artists' works examines how these artists brought the art of Pakistan into the international art arena by spurning orientalist and academic painting to create a new language of art making with antecedents in western art movements. While establishing this modern syntax, LAC members tried to avoid the nationalist or Islamic rhetoric of a newly established state. Although four of the six artists of LAC were migrants from India and were initially not pleased to migrate to Lahore, the change provided a focus and platform to emphasize the identity of the artists working within an international forum.²⁴²

²⁴² As described earlier in chapter 1, in the political arena the Muslim League was struggling to get the due representation for Muslims in Parliament. In Colonial India, Muslims lagged behind in the social scene because they were in conflict with the British Empire for religious reasons. For example; the use of pork ingredients in the making of bullets and the reason why Muslim soldiers refused to serve in the British army in World War II. In addition, in retaliation to British Raj, Muslims refused to learn the English language; however which Sir Syed Ahmed Khan encouraged Muslims to learn English. As a result, all the higher rank jobs were given to Hindus. In such social and political situation, where Hindus were in the majority and favored by British, Muslims were in the minority, and were suppressed, and were struggling to rise in their particular circumstances. In a scenario where the Muslims were already facing difficulties in attaining equal rights in relation to the Hindu majority, the establishment of Pakistan might have been conceived as an opportunity for these artists enabling them to carve a niche for themselves.

LAC artists also faced a challenge in making art that could be on an equal footing with the rest of the world without serving as propaganda for the new state. At this time, Pakistan was a state that was free of any official religious affiliation (unlike the Hindu nationalism of pre-Partition India). On August 14, 1947, the country's founder Quaid-e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah outlined his vision of Pakistan in an address to his constituents, and spoke of an inclusive and impartial government, religious freedom, rule of law and equality. Accordingly, his views were still fresh in the minds of citizens of the newly established nation.

Section I

3.1 A New Beginning in Lahore

When it was founded in 1952, the Lahore Art Circle (LAC) had six members including Shakir Ali, Sheikh Safdar Ali, Syed Ali Imam, Moyene Najmi, Ahmed Parvez and Anwar Jalal Shemza.²⁴³ Instead of joining these painters together in terms of a common style, they might be more convincingly be united in terms of the many questions they were empirically posing through their art, questions that would preclude only one direction. Hence, LAC was founded on its member's common belief: to have the freedom to create art without yielding to pressures to develop the pictorial equivalents of an Islamic fundamentalism or traditional art practices.²⁴⁴ For this study, the six founding artists of LAC provide a cohesive narrative that emphasizes their united approach

²⁴³ See Chapter 2 footnote 210 for detail of other members of LAC.

²⁴⁴ See Chapter 2 (section 2.5), based on a comparative study of PAG with LAC, author of this study has proposed a possible manifesto for LAC.

towards experimentation in modern art while still maintaining the similarities and differences of individual artists in LAC.

Though Shakir Ali is named (above) as one of the founding members of LAC, art historical scholarship in Pakistan has not yet considered him a formal member or active participant in this group. As mentioned in Chapter 2, he is rather identified as a tacit mentor.²⁴⁵ The meeting minutes of the LAC presented in chapter 2, however, illuminate Shakir Ali's active and leading role in the group. In order to analyze how the works of the six founding artists initiated a modern art movement in Pakistan, it is imperative to contextualize the biographies of these artists within the newly established country in order to explicate the presence of hybridity in their lives and work.

3.1 a. Shakir Ali

Not only was Shakir Ali a senior artist, but he was also the only artist formally educated in eastern and western artistic traditions. With his position and qualifications, he played a pivotal role in changing the way art was conceived and perceived in Pakistan. Though the change did not occur overnight, he and his younger cohorts shaped a new idiom in painting. The biography of Shakir Ali in Chapter 2 details his early education in colonial India as well as his stay in Europe. His training in the traditional Bengal School and European naturalistic academic styles, combined with his years spent in Europe

²⁴⁵ See Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, Atteqa Ali. PhD dissertation, *Impassioned Play: Social Commentary and Formal Experimentation in Contemporary Pakistani Art*, Hassan. *Painters of Pakistan*, Jalaluddin Ahmed, *Contemporary Painters of Pakistan*.

studying painting and textile design, gave him first-hand exposure to art from around the globe.

3.1 b. Anwar Jalal Shemza

The most well known artist of LAC is Anwar Jalal Shemza.²⁴⁶ Today, his work is in the collection of the Tate Britain and has captivated the attention of scholars and art collectors in the West. His works, produced in England between 1956 and 1985, are the topic of scholarly discussion today and are labeled as calligraphic abstractions inspired by Islamic calligraphy and geometric design.²⁴⁷ However, his earlier works created before his move to England in 1956, remain in obscurity, though they are crucial to the development of his artistic oeuvre (discussed in Section III of this chapter).

Just like Shakir Ali, Shemza was passionate about reading and writing in addition to painting.²⁴⁸ Shemza was born in 1928 in Shimla, India to a Kashmiri family. His family owned a carpet business in Ludhiana, and his grandfather knew the skill of carpet making. From an early age, Shemza was exposed to the rich, colorful patterns and designs of Persian carpets. His father wrote poetry, which fostered Shemza's passion for

²⁴⁶ The Tate Britain has exhibited selections of Anwar Shemza's work in a spotlight room display (October 12, 2015 - Autumn 2016).

²⁴⁷ Iftikhar Dadi has extensively studied Shemza's work and has curated a number of exhibitions of his art in collaboration with Green Cardamom, Jhaveri Contemporary, and Gallery 83 London. He has recently published panel discussions and the essay. Iftikhar Dadi. Anwar Jalal Shemza: Calligraphic Abstraction, *Perspectives 1* London: Green Cardamom (2009) and the monograph Iftikhar Dadi. *Anwar Jalal Shemza* (London: Ridinghouse, 2015).

²⁴⁸ Anwar Jalal Shemza is most commonly known by his pen name Shemza and that is the name the dissertation will use to address him.

reading and writing.²⁴⁹ Shemza completed his early education in Ludhiana (India) and came to Lahore in 1943 to study Persian, Arabic, and Philosophy at the University of the Punjab, Lahore (colonial India). But in 1944, he switched his focus to studio arts and enrolled in the Mayo School of Art (now NCA). He received his diploma in Commercial Arts in 1947.²⁵⁰ While studying at the Mayo School of Art, Shemza showed little interest in drawing from life; he was more inclined toward decorative designs and illustrations.²⁵¹ At this time, many young artists earned their living by working for advertising agencies. After his graduation from Mayo School of Art, Shemza returned to Shimla and opened his namesake design studio. In the same year, the bloodshed of Partition forced Shemza and his sister to flee from Shimla and join their family in Lahore, where he reopened the studio as a joint venture with his friend, the artist Moyene Najmi, another founding member of LAC.²⁵² The commercial advertising studio had to be closed, due to the turmoil surrounding Partition. During this time period, according to an Urdu writer Zulfiqar Tabish, “literature, poetry, and fictional writing dominated Lahore’s intellectual atmosphere”.²⁵³ In the late 1940’s, Shemza became associated with the Urdu literary circle of Lahore called, *Halqa-e-Ahbab-i- Zouq*, and very much enjoyed the company of

²⁴⁹ Anna Molka, *Anwar Jalal Shemza* (Lahore: The University of the Punjab, 1956), 6.

²⁵⁰ As part of British strategy to encourage the production of art and craft in a more refined manner to cater the European consumerists, four major craft centers were established in Madras (1853), Calcutta (1854), Bombay (1857), and Lahore (1872). The Mayo School of Art was one of these centers located in Lahore.

²⁵¹ Ayesha Siddiqui, “Shemza: The Lahori Artist who Juggled Symbols,” in *Lahore: Paintings, Murals, and Calligraphy*, (India: Marg publications, 2010), 140.

²⁵² Mary Shemza, “Anwar Jalal Shemza: Search for Cultural Identity”, *Third Text* (1989): 65.

²⁵³ Zulfiqar Tabish, “Anwar Jalal Shemza,” *Mah-i-Nau*, February 1996.

the famous Urdu writer Sadat Hasan Manto.²⁵⁴ Manto's work was considered bitter and blunt, as he depicted the realities of life in his short stories set during Partition. Shemza himself was a talented writer, and during these years, he wrote several short stories, as well as plays for Radio Pakistan, and novels.²⁵⁵ He published seven Urdu novels including *Jinias* (1953), *Tanhai Ki Awaaz* (1953), *Kissa Kahani* (1954), *Zard Patta* (1955), *Akaila Aadmi* (1956), *Sotay Jagtay* (1957), and *Zameen Aasman* (1958). Because of his fiction writing, he took up the pen name of "Shemza."²⁵⁶ In addition, he edited the Urdu literary journal *Ehsas* for three years.²⁵⁷

Shemza was also a painter, a designer, and a teacher.²⁵⁸ He taught painting and drawing at the Lawrence College Public School for Boys Ghora Gali in Murree, and then he taught at the Cathedral School Lahore between the years of 1953 to 1954. Though his teaching career began in Pakistan, he taught in England throughout his life. While studying in England, Shemza wrote to his friend and poet Karam Nawaz (1926-1995) and expressed his wish to return to Pakistan after completing his education so that he could

²⁵⁴ Zia Moheyuddin mentions Anwar Jalal Shemza and Moyene Najmi both valued Saadat Hasan Manto and visited him in his apartment at Laxmi Mansions in 1949, Lahore. They wanted Manto to inaugurate their forthcoming exhibition. But no other information regarding the exhibition was provided. <http://jang.com.pk/thenews/may2012-weekly/nos-06-05-2012/manto/abovenormal.asp> (Accessed on Jan 22, 2016)

²⁵⁵ Iftikhar Dadi. *Anwar Jalal Shemza* (London: Ridinghouse 2015), 9.

²⁵⁶ Munawar Zareef a comedian and classmate of Anwar Jalal asked him why he was Shemza and Anwar Jalal told him that it was his pen name as he had just written a book. See Shoaib Hashmi, "Moyene Najmi", *The News on Sunday*, June 29, 1997.

²⁵⁷ Iftikhar Dadi. Calligraphic Abstraction: Anwar Jalal Shemza, " *Perspectives 1* London: Green Cardamom (2009). Iftikhar Dadi. *Anwar Jalal Shemza*, 9.

²⁵⁸ Shemza designed cover pages for his novels and also for those of his close poet friend Karam Nawaz. Few of his designs from the cover pages of his novels are known to survive.

share his knowledge with students in his country.²⁵⁹ He also actively participated in organizing the “Child Art” exhibition with his friend Moyene Najmi at Aitchison College Lahore in 1956 (just before his departure to London to pursue higher education). Shemza was an active member of LAC between 1952 and 1956 and he participated in several group shows alongside his fellow artists.

One of the impetuses for Shemza’s artistic development and engagement with western modernism was his move to London. In 1956, Shemza was awarded a scholarship by the British Council of Art to attend the Slade School of Arts London, where he received a diploma in fine arts in 1959. Between 1949 and 1958 several artists from South Asia had migrated to London, including Safiuddin Ahmed, Murtaza Bashir, Syed Avinash Chandra, Iqbal Geoffrey, F. M. Husain, Ali Imam, Ahmed Parvez, and F. N Souza. These artists who were already established in their home countries of India and Pakistan, encountered difficulty in trying to break into the western art scene because they were viewed as representatives of their colonial past, not as contemporary artists. Some of them came to study art while other artists relocated in the United Kingdom because they were frustrated by the lack of critical and international perspectives in art institutions at home; many artists moved to London because they were seduced by modernism.²⁶⁰ During his years at the Slade School, Shemza married the English painter Mary Katrina. After completing his degree, he returned to Pakistan with his wife for a short period of

²⁵⁹ Mary Shemza has shared Shemza’s letters, which were written to Karam Nawaz and are dated 1958, with the author. Author’s interview with Mary Shemza at her residence in London, Spring 2014.

²⁶⁰ Leyla Fakhr. “Artist in Pursuit of an International Language,” *Migrations: Journey into British Art Tate Britain Catalogue*, 2012, p. 70-72

time but moved back to the United Kingdom in 1962 to work as an art teacher at a high school. He taught in London from 1962 until his death in 1985.

Shemza's work between 1947 and 1956 will be further analyzed in Section III to demonstrate his break from the earlier Bengal School style and his experimentation with new idioms and the modern. His active engagement with the literary circle in Lahore enriched his critical thinking and enabled him to embrace the new trends of the modern world that were visible both in the visual arts and the literary field. While he was creating experimental paintings as part of LAC, he was also changing the way of telling traditional folktales, by rewriting them with a modern twist.

3.1 c. Sheikh Safdar Ali

Sheikh Safdar Ali, a quiet and levelheaded founding member of LAC, prolifically painted during his lifetime but is mostly known as a designer and entrepreneur of SV Advertising Company in Lahore. He is one of the first modern artists of Pakistan to adopt the use of a grid pattern, which later became his signature style in his work. Born in Gujarat, Pakistan in 1924 to the middle-class family of Rabia Begum and Mohammad Ali, Safdar demonstrated an exceptional talent for drawing from an early age. Largely self-taught, Safdar pursued an informal art education by copying reproductions of famous old and modern western masters' works, which he found in his elder brother's poster collection.

Safdar experienced a difficult childhood, which was marked by his father's death when he was only two. His elder brother Barkat Ali supported the family financially

throughout Safdar's early years. According to Safdar's son, Nasir Ali, his grandmother would tell him stories about his father's passion for drawing. She described how Safdar, at age 13, would draw huge charcoal pictures of the neighborhood on the walls of his home.²⁶¹ Due to grim financial circumstances, in 1940 Safdar had to move to Bombay at the age of 16 to make a living and to further his art education. Safdar managed to meet Karachi-based artist Muhammad Turab (1907-1977), who was working as a set designer in the Bombay film industry.²⁶²

Safdar used his proficient drawing skills to persuade Turab to employ him as a member of his set-design team. He began to earn his livelihood by painting the backgrounds of film sets. Whenever his financial situation allowed, Safdar would take art classes at J.J. School of Art.²⁶³ Later, Safdar worked on freelance projects, designing brochures and press layouts in addition to the film set designs he made for Turab. Between 1944 and 1946, he received a commission to design decorations for the *All India Industrial Exhibition* in Karachi. During these same years, Safdar along with several fellow artist friends formed *The Muslim Art Sketch Club*, which many young commercial

²⁶¹ Author's interview with Nasir Ali (son of Sheikh Safdar Ali) in Houston, Texas, March 2015.

²⁶² Muhammad Turab was born in Hyderabad Deccan and learned to paint from Ustad Mohammed Abdul Qayyum who was famous for painting stage sets Turab worked as a set designer in Bombay from 1924 to 1947, when he migrated to Karachi, Pakistan, at the time of Independence. Author's interview with Nasir Ali.

²⁶³ According to Nasir Ali, Turab mentored Safdar during his days at Bombay Talkies and supported him in many other ways. When Safdar brought his wife to Bombay, Turab provided a place in his house for the newly wedded couple to live. After Partition, Turab settled in Karachi. Nasir Ali recalled his family visiting Turab in Karachi.

To further supplement his income Safdar also made tattoo designs. Nasir Ali also recalled seeing a photograph of his father design of an eagle tattooed on the back of a white man (probably a navy officer). Author's interview with Nasir Ali in Houston, Texas, March 2015.

artists joined, including the most celebrated modern Indian artist, Maqbool Fida Husain, a founding member of PAG.²⁶⁴

While working at Bombay Talkies, Safdar established himself as a successful commercial artist. He lived well, traveled throughout India, and enjoyed becoming acquainted with its spectacular art and architecture. His visits to Ajanta, Ellora, and Elephanta sparked his great respect for traditional Indian painting, including the Mughal and Pahari Schools. Among western artists, Safdar appreciated works by Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, and Salvador Dalí, all of which were familiar to him from mass-media journals he had studied in his childhood. Among the most important artists in pre-Partition India, Safdar admired the earlier landscape paintings of Krishna Howlaji Ara (1914-1985), Syed Haider Raza (b. 1922), and Sadanand K. Bakre (1920-2007), which he was able to see in the annual exhibition of paintings of the Bombay artists. He was also a great admirer of the Indian painters Kanu Desai (1907-1980) and Jamini Roy (1887-1972).²⁶⁵ The work that Safdar painted after launching his artistic career in 1952 reflects his exposure to these artists' works.

After the Partition, Safdar migrated to Pakistan to join his family in Lahore.²⁶⁶ He then moved to Karachi with his family to work in the film industry again. He was

²⁶⁴ In many of his exhibition catalogs and in Anna Molka's monograph, Sheikh Safdar mentioned the formation of *The Muslim Art Sketch Club*. But the author was unable to find any reference outside these sources mentioned. Anna Molka, "Monograph Number Seven," *Sheikh Safdar*, The Department of Fine Arts, University of the Punjab, Lahore, 1957, 10.

²⁶⁵ Anna Molka. "Sheikh Safdar Ali," *Monograph Number Seven* (Lahore: University of Punjab, 1957), 7-10.

²⁶⁶ Nasir Ali notes that his mother was already in Gujarat at the time of Partition. He also informed the author that Safdar did not go through the trauma of migration as others did by walking on foot and taking the packed train. He instead took a flight to Lahore. Author's interview with Nasir Ali.

successful in securing contracts to decorate the interiors of cinema theaters such as the Nishat, Nigar, and Nagina in Karachi. As this was a financially difficult time, Safdar tried to use his drafting skills in other fields. He worked for the advertising agency called “Kontakt” and simultaneously made perspective drawings and building designs for a construction company. Kontakt’s clientele included major Pakistani industries such as Bata Shoe Company, Lipton Tea and General Motors. The company sent Safdar to Lahore in 1951 to open the art department of its new branch.²⁶⁷ Safdar became a frequent visitor to the Tea and Coffee House and was closely associated with the young artists who gathered there. Shakir Ali lived close to Safdar’s house, which became the venue for late night gatherings when artists did not meet at the Coffee House. At this time, in the company of Shakir Ali and other fellow artists, Safdar became inspired and started to paint seriously. His earlier works were mimetic representations reminiscent of his film stage background, but his continuous experimentation eventually developed into his signature style, which used a grid with landscapes and figures. This style was more in tune with the art movements of the West and will be discussed in detail in Section III of this chapter. Safdar lived throughout his life in Pakistan and continued to paint.

3.1 d. Syed Ali Imam

Like Shakir Ali and Anwar Jalal Shemza, Ali Imam was an avid reader of history books throughout his life. He was also very critical of his own work. Never satisfied, he believed that he was a much better teacher than an artist. He spent his life informally

²⁶⁷ Anna Molka, “Sheikh Safdar,” 10.

teaching his close circle of friends and students about art history around the world and significantly contributed to the promotion of gallery culture in Pakistan.²⁶⁸

Ali Imam was born in 1924, Narsingapur, Madhya Pradesh, India, and was the third of the six children of Tahira and Mohammad Razi. His father was a forest officer, and Imam grew up in a lush green forest, which gave him pleasant memories of his early childhood. After separating from her husband when her son was ten years old, Ali Imam's mother raised him. This separation had a profound effect on him; he was very close to his father, but due to the unhappy circumstances between his parents, he was not allowed frequent visits with his father. In Ali Imam's words, "I loved my father very much and missed him terribly. Because of these circumstances, a little distortion came into our personalities, all of us became somewhat solitary people, private and reserved."²⁶⁹

Ali Imam's eldest brother Mohammad Raza was a writer. His second eldest brother is the famous Indian painter Syed Haider Raza, who was also one of the founding members of the PAG. After Partition, Syed Haider Raza settled in Paris where he became an internationally acclaimed painter while Ali Imam's migrated to Pakistan at the time of Partition, which initially strained the relationship between the two siblings. However, later the two became close as they connected through letters and phone calls and mended their relationship.²⁷⁰ At an early age, Imam was actively involved in

²⁶⁸ Author's interview with Mrs. Ali Imam in Karachi, January 2015.

²⁶⁹ Hussain, *Ali Imam: Man of the Arts*, 15.

extracurricular activities at his school where he was publishing short stories in his Hindi school magazine. Imam received his early art education at Nagpur School of Art, but his early inspiration for art developed while observing his elder brother Syed Haider Raza, who had joined the J. J. School of Arts. Ali Imam graduated from high school and excelled in science, but he followed the footsteps of his elder brother and decided to pursue an art career. Without the approval of his father, who discouraged his pursuit of art, Imam moved to Bombay in 1946 and enrolled on a part-time basis in evening classes at the J. J. School of Arts while working at the Tata Memorial Cancer Hospital as a medical artist. Kattingeri Krishna Hebbar (1911-1986), a teacher and a modern painter at J.J. School of Art, convinced Imam to continue his education to nourish his thinking mind.²⁷¹ Meanwhile, Ali Imam started to develop an interest in Communism. As Pakistani writer Marjorie Husain notes, “Ali Imam resented both the foreign dominance and the power of Indian princes. He did not want to work for individuals but for causes and the betterment of people as a whole.”²⁷²

In the mid-1940s, the revolt against British colonialism and demand for a separate homeland (Pakistan) for Indian Muslims intensified. As partition drew closer, rioting and looting became more frequent, Ali Imam was forced to leave Delhi and migrate to Lahore along with his eldest brother, but thought he would return to India once the conflict

²⁷⁰ Mrs. Ali Imam stated that Syed Haider Raza never wanted his family to move to Pakistan. He did not like the idea of Partition and tried to convince Ali Imam to stay but in the land of his forefathers. Author’s interview with Mrs. Ali Imam.

²⁷¹ Husain, *Ali Imam: Man of the Arts*, 15-20.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 21.

settled.²⁷³ Ali never wanted to leave India and wrote, “I had so much love for my roots and soil I told my elder brother that I would like to live in a part of the world where my whole childhood reminiscences where my parents were buried and where my background is.”²⁷⁴

Upon their arrival in Lahore, the family decided to settle in Rawalpindi, where Ali Imam had a friend. In Rawalpindi, he resumed his college education, joined Gordon College to pursue a bachelor’s degree and also worked part-time as a telephone operator. In Ali Imam’s words, “It was a traumatic experience leaving India but once I left, I never looked back.”²⁷⁵ In Gordon College, Ali Imam became interested in Marxist thought and started reading the Communist newspaper “Peoples’ Voice,” during his work commute. Within a year, he joined The Muslim Student Federation, which became a small Marxist group of twenty-four people. This was the beginning of Imam’s involvement as an active member of the Communist Party, which he formally joined in 1949 and left in 1951. During those years, he became friends with many like-minded people, including writer Faiz Ahmed Faiz, but he was arrested three times and accused of speaking against the government and distributing anti-government pamphlets. For the next few years, Imam stayed underground, eventually becoming disillusioned with party politics and critical of the fact that the Communist manifesto had little to do with the people of the subcontinent.

²⁷³ This was a general perception among the people of India. They anticipated returning to or at least being able to visit, their homes, once the dust of Partition settles. It is also said that even the founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah believed this to be so, and maintained the ownership of his home in Bombay.

²⁷⁴ Husain, *Ali Imam: Man of the Arts*, 15-20.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

He contended that Pakistan should not look to Russia for guidance but look within its own social structure. Ali Imam proposed changes to the manifesto and the party name but due to the refusal of his proposal and conflict within the party, Imam withdrew from the party in 1951 and remained a Marxist in principle.²⁷⁶

Imam devoted his full energy to his lifelong love for art. He continued to paint thematic scenes from villages: gusts of the blowing wind, the threshing of corn, interiors of villages, and their people. Although he was painting picturesque sceneries, he started to pursue abstraction, which entered into his work through simplified representations of scenes. Ali Imam's career also changed as he took up the role of an art educator, which became his lifelong passion. In 1952, he joined Lawrence College, Ghora Gali, Murree, where he became incharge of the art department. Imam recalls:

My art was directed by my early experience involving the respect for life and consideration for human surroundings ingrained in me. These factors brought me into the Marxist movement, and when I resigned, it was as if I had resigned from life. I continued to paint, it was a process that had started way back in 1941 when I joined the Nagpur School of Art evening classes, and continued through my student years at Gordon College. I even continued painting while I was working in the Communist Party. The painting process never stopped, only the time given to it varied.²⁷⁷

During this time, he made frequent trips to Lahore, which was an artistic center. There he was a frequent visitor to the Pak Tea House and the Coffee House where he met Shakir Ali who was heading the Department of Fine Arts at the Mayo School of Art at the time. He and his other fellow artists founded LAC in that same year, 1952. He recalls:

²⁷⁶ Husain, *Ali Imam*, 23.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

In Lahore where I wanted to settle, a group of us created the Lahore Art circle. The secretary of the group was Saleem Shahid of Radio Pakistan, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Mariam Habib, Moyene Najmi, Ahmed Parvez, Safdar Ali and I were part of this group. Together we held exhibitions in Lahore, Murree, and Karachi under the auspices of LAC. In the meantime, Professor Shakir Ali was a very knowledgeable and experienced teacher. He was extremely well read and informed and he had the latest of Avant-Garde information on art. The LAC movement revolved around him. In a sense he was not our teacher; he was our guide. He gave us spiritual and intellectual guidance in painting and transformation entered our works.²⁷⁸

Ali Imam was very impressed by Shakir's vision of modern art and considered him avant-garde because of his knowledge of the western art movements. It is, however, strange that he called Shakir Ali a "spiritual guide," but not a teacher, implying that he was interested in the concept of art making, but not in the skill. In Lahore, Ali Imam exhibited his work, wrote reviews for media, and awarded prizes to talented students whose work was exhibited in shows curated by Professor Anna Molka at the University of the Punjab. These art exhibitions were held to encourage and promote professional artists and students of Punjab.

Ali Imam also taught at Sadiq Public School Bahawalpur in 1956, but he moved to London after only a year to gain exposure to western art. In London, he initially worked odd jobs while continuing to paint and regularly exhibiting his works. As mentioned above, three LAC members met and formed another group called the Pakistan Group, in London, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. Ali Imam lived in London for ten years, upon his return to Pakistan in 1967, he settled in Karachi. He became the head of the Karachi Arts Council and conducted art classes for the next few years. In 1970, he

²⁷⁸ Husain, *Ali Imam*, 31.

opened an art gallery at his residence, which he called Indus Gallery. The gallery became the meeting point and cultural hub for painters, sculptors, craftsmen, art critics, teachers, students, and art collectors. Between 1970 and 2002, Ali Imam had curated about 200 exhibitions of works by various artists, including F. N. Souza, and Fida Maqbool Husain.²⁷⁹ Ali Imam collected antiquities from India, including objects from Gandhara and the Indus Valley that he acquired during the trips to the northern region of Pakistan and also amassed a collection of African masks. For teaching purposes, he archived all the articles and art exhibitions in Pakistan from 1970 until his death in 2002. In his lifetime, he donated his archives to the “Foundation for Museum of Modern Art,” Karachi for educational purposes.

3.1 e. Moyene Najmi

Although not as prolific as the other LAC members, Moyene Najmi painted very few works and they are exquisite and sophisticated in their style and technique. Moyene was born to an affluent family in Lahore in 1926. He received his primary education at Sacred Heart High School in Lahore and later studied for his Senior Cambridge exams at the boarding school of Bishop Cotton School, in Shimla.²⁸⁰ During this time in Shimla, Moyene started studying painting under the famous Russian painter Svetoslav Nikolaevich Roerich (1904-1993), who was well known for his mountainous landscapes

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 73.

²⁸⁰ Senior Cambridge is essentially equivalent to a high School exam.

of India.²⁸¹ No known records explain how Moyene came to know Roerich, though Moyene recalled exhibiting his work in a group show with S. Roerich, Amrita Sher-Gil, and Jamini Roy, which was held in Shimla between 1946 and 1947.²⁸² Amrita Sher-Gil and Jamini Roy, as discussed in Chapter 1 were the most prolific pre-Partition artists, each known for their respective styles of painting that significantly contributed to the eclectic art of India.

With the difficult circumstances caused by Partition, Moyene returned to Lahore where he and his well-established family helped refugee families settle in the areas adjacent to their residence. In 1948, he collaborated with his artist friend Anwar Jalal Shemza to establish a commercial advertising studio in Lahore.²⁸³ In the following year, he regularly visited the Pak Tea House and the Coffee House, and became involved with other young artists like A.J. Shemza and Ali Imam. In 1952, along with Shemza, Safdar, and Ali Imam, Moyene founded LAC and became the most active organizer of the group. In the same year, he also joined and took charge of the art department at Aitchison College, Lahore.²⁸⁴ Like Safdar, Moyene was known for his calm demeanor among LAC

²⁸¹ S. Roerich was the son of famous Russian painter, Nicholas Roerich. He moved to India in early 30's and then lived his life in India till his death in 1993. S. Roerich's expertise was in painting the mountainous landscapes of India.

²⁸² Mrs. Moyene Najmi, also confirmed this fact in an interview with the author in Lahore, summer of 2013. Kamal Hayat, a Pakistani banker, and painter, who studied under Moyene Najmi in Aitchison College Lahore, wrote an article on his mentor, "Setting New Standards", *Pakistan Times*, 1998 (the date is unfortunately not available). Kamal Hayat also writes about the exhibition, in which Moyene exhibited along Amrita Sher-Gil, S. Roerich and Jamini Roy in Shimla. According to Kamal Hayat, Moyene Najmi gave him the information about the exhibition. Author's conversation with Kamal Hayat over the phone on January 30, 2016.

²⁸³ Shemza, "Anwar Jalal Shemza: Search for Cultural Identity", 66.

artists. English literature professor Shoaib Hashmi, who was well acquainted with and a frequent visitor to LAC evening meetings, describes Moyene Najmi's composed and kind nature that amicably resolved conflicts among the group, "[I]n 40 years I do not know of a time when he [Moyene] lost his shirt or raised his voice. And he did his art too in a quite way—quite unflamboyant."²⁸⁵ Hashmi elsewhere writes that Moyene's calm nature enabled him to avoid jealousy, bickering, and backbiting in LAC and brought such *aashufta sar* (impulsive people) together. Moyene was not a prolific painter, yet his work is among the finest produced by LAC members. His use of color and his technique was mature and sophisticated. Moyene was inspired by western ways of living and even dressed in a three-piece suit when painting.²⁸⁶ He never had any solo shows, but exhibited with groups of artists. In a group exhibition of 1954, held at the University of the Punjab Lahore, Moyene was awarded the University shield for men. Kamal Hayat, one of his students and a painter from Pakistan states, "Moyene spent twenty-three years in art education and dedicated seven years exclusively to painting. This partly explains his not having left behind much of his works."²⁸⁷

Unlike other LAC members, Moyene lived in Lahore all his life, and he briefly traveled to Sri Lanka and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1958 for a painting tour. On his return, he joined the Pakistan Arts Council (now known as Alhamra Arts Council)

²⁸⁴ The college was founded by the British in 1882 and even today represents the legacy of Brown Sahib (elite class), to which T. B. Macaulay called as "... class of interpreters, Indian in color and English in taste."

²⁸⁵ Shoaib Hashmi, "Moyene Najmi", *The News on Sunday*, June 29, 1997.

²⁸⁶ Author's interview with Mrs. Moyene Najmi in Lahore, August 2014.

²⁸⁷ Kamal Hayat, "Setting New Trends," *The Pakistan Times*, 1998.

and established “Hut” in collaboration with the famous poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who was the first Director of the Arts Council. Hut was a community organization that offered drawing and painting lessons for the general public and children. Moyene’s contribution in promoting art among children is far greater than any of his other colleagues. After joining Aitchison College, he held the very first art exhibition for children of Pakistan. The exhibition took place on the occasion of the Diamond cum Platinum Jubilee of Aitchison College Lahore in 1956. Children from state and independent schools were invited from all over Pakistan to participate in the exhibition. Moyene invited his LAC friends to join in for this important occasion, and they happily took on various responsibilities in organizing the show. In collaboration with this exhibition, Anwar Jalal produced the first catalog of the *Children’s Exhibition*; Sheikh Safdar designed the inside of the cover page of the catalog; Shakir Ali served as one of the judges of the selection committee, and Moyene himself wrote the introductory statement in the exhibition.²⁸⁸

The full statement is attached as appendix 4, however, a key excerpt states:

A child must be free and must have an opening to express in his own way his natural inhibitions and desires. The experience of handling the medium of painting unconsciously supplies the child with an outlet, which consequently makes his mental growth healthy and prepares him to adjust himself to the problems of life. Thus, a child’s mental process of growth is assisted as much by art as by his environment. . . . The child who is allowed and encouraged to function freely as an artist is merely learning to be a whole person. This technique

²⁸⁸ The selection committee for this exhibition included the prominent personalities and artists of Lahore including Abdur Rahman Chughtai, Zubeida Agha, Shakir Ali, Mrs. Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Mrs. Satnam Mehmood, and Moyene Najmi. The child who won the “Abdur Rahman Chughtai Gold Medal” in this exhibition is Kamal Khan, the most renowned architect of Pakistan today. It must be noted that the most prominent schools that participated in this exhibitions were all the institutions to which LAC artists were providing art education for example: Sadiq Public School Bahawalpur (Ali Imam, art teacher), Queen Mary College Lahore (Mariam Habib, art teacher), Cathedral School Lahore (Anwar Jalal, art Teacher), Bai Virbaijee Soparivala Parsi High School Karachi (Shakir Ali, art teacher, 1951) and Lawrence College Ghora Gali Murree (Ali Imam and Anwar Jalal both taught there).

is not followed by the old school of thought, which insists on the child being constantly guided and influenced by the teacher in his method of expression. Happily that old conception of child art education is now considered obsolete as the use of a flickering candle in the age of electricity. . . . The underlying idea of this whole exhibition is not only to form a basis for future child art representations but also to encourage the children to paint and gain confidence in their work. . . . This exhibition is also a pointer to the authorities concerned to take steps to improve the standard of child art education where it is required and encourage those institutions with better facilities where it has found its real importance.²⁸⁹

Moyene Najmi made very few public statements and this one gives a rare glimpse of his views regarding art production, even in its reference to children. This statement is entirely consistent with LAC's philosophical outlook and it also clearly indicates that Moyene was quite progressive in his teaching pedagogy and believed in adapting new and modern ideas to stay abreast with the changing times. He not only presented his own teaching philosophy based on the modern ideology of individualism, but also emphasized the need to promote the creative arts as part of a curriculum. To further encourage the students to continue their exploration of the creative arts, the *Children's Exhibition* awarded "Lahore Art Circle Shield" to the school that exhibited the best set of paintings and it went to Queen Mary College Lahore for Girls.

In 1973, Moyene developed a portion of his residence at 6 Golf Road, Chamba House, in Lahore into an art gallery that was called ART GALLERIES. His residential address was also used on the stationary of LAC (see appendix 5). Moyene taught at the Aitchison College for many years and did not paint very much after LAC dispersed in 1958. However, he kept in touch with his best friend Ali Imam and invited him to collaborate with him in curating shows of younger artists' work in his ART

²⁸⁹ Child Art Exhibition held at Aitchison College Lahore, 1956.

GALLERIES. In the last years of his life, he stopped painting and closed down his gallery. He died in 1985.

3.1 f. Ahmed Parvez

Ahmed Parvez was an LAC member who prolifically painted and exhibited his work in England. He was known to be loud, hotheaded, eccentric, and dramatic. Ahmed Parvez embodied the stereotype of the crazy artist; on one occasion he ripped one of his paintings, wore it around his neck and danced in the streets of London because he had not received the attention that he believed his creative genius deserved.²⁹⁰ Ahmed Parvez could not tolerate someone ignoring him or his work. He was born in 1926 in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and received his early childhood education in St. Joseph's College Baramulla, Kashmir. He later came back to Rawalpindi where he briefly attended Gordon College. From early childhood, he was fond of drawing but his father forced him to choose a lucrative profession. Because of his father's wish, Ahmed Parvez took a clerical job in a business firm in Karachi and worked there for four years. Later, much to his family's disapproval, he decided to pursue a career in art. He resigned from his job in Karachi and apprenticed with his uncle Jacobus Michael at his art studio in Lahore for three years. Michael was an excellent draftsman and wanted to transfer the quality of his

²⁹⁰ Many of Ahmed Ahmed Parvez's friends, including Shafi Aqeel (in his book *Char Jadid Musavvir*), Wahab Jaffar (in an interview with the author in January 2015 Karachi, Pakistan), have narrated the incident when out of frustration Parvez slit his canvases in middle and wore his paintings around the neck and danced in the streets of London. Ahmed Parvez himself narrated it in the following way: "In London I could not exhibit for three years. In other words my work was not accepted. I once became so disheartened, that I cut all my canvases and put them around my neck. As I walked the streets in silence the people left my path." See Marjorie Husain. *Ahmed Parvez*, "Ahmed Parvez Writes About Himself", Karachi: Elite Publisher Ltd., 2004), 12.

skill to Ahmed Parvez, who was not interested in academic realism. Ahmed Parvez states:

As long as he [Michael] could draw a perfect circle without the help of any instrument, he needed nothing else to assert himself as a great master. . . . To my horror, he would also draw an absolutely straight line with tremendous pride and ease, and divide it into twelve equal parts, each part being an exact inch, and would challenge any upstart from the new generation, including myself, to compare it with a foot ruler.²⁹¹

This training under Michael (who was deeply rooted in the European naturalistic academic style and an absolute perfectionist) did not give Ahmed Parvez much freedom to explore his own creative impulses. Michael did not allow his nephew to stray away from the practice of naturalism. He discouraged and snubbed any inclination that Ahmed Parvez showed towards the modern art of the West, especially his admiration of drawings by Vincent Van Gogh since Michael considered Van Gogh's drawing to be bad work. Nevertheless, Ahmed Parvez was very intrigued by the modern art. He states:

The "Living Stream of Art," was not far from his studio. It was flowing in the art books of the British Council Library. Since I could not afford any of the art publications I would borrow these and deposit them with the *tandur walla* the owner of a roadside-eating place where I used to lunch. The books were obviously safe as the owner and his customers had neither the time nor the inclinations to make a study of modern art. . . . Each day as I went for lunch I would find some time to enjoy the adventures of modern art, the dictators and gentle rebels and all. The more I studied the clearer I became that my very loving Uncle, my only teacher, would not allow me to take a single breath of artistic freedom. He had his own interpretation of the 'Classic' art which he wished me to master. An art which was a mixture of commercial, calligraphic, and the well known debunked art of the cinema hoardings. He in fact, set a pattern for an art tyranny that had not existed before for me—the oval heads in three equal parts, the forehead, the nose, and the rest. And then, of course, each body equal to eight heads remained, or had to remain, an amazing discovery. Side by side with the imperative oval, there existed some such as [sic] that had to be mastered- the Roman, the Gothic, and the rest. And then I had to convert my ovals into faces, chickens, Daira-e-noons

²⁹¹ Husain, "Ahmed Parvez Writes About Himself,"10-11.

(circles and semi-circles), and perhaps in some enlightened moments, they had to be converted into dogs and puppies.²⁹²

Despite all of his resistance and boredom, while learning the skill of naturalistic painting for three years, Ahmed Parvez credited his uncle with instilling in him the skill and spirit of painting that remained his lifelong vocation. In 1951, Ahmed Parvez left Michael's studio and took up painting as an independent professional artist. In 1952, he participated for the first time in a group show at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, where he won the "Punjab University Shield for Men," for the best painting.²⁹³ This success boosted his confidence, and for the next eight months, Ahmed Parvez painted day and night. During this time, his work still carried the naturalism he had learned, but his paintings like Ali Imam's became simplified in their representation of human forms.

In 1953, he had his first solo show at the United States Information Center, Murree. The same year he held a second solo show at the University of the Punjab, Lahore. In the meantime, he developed a close friendship with Shakir and at one point lived in his house for a few months between 1953 and 1954. He painted in Shakir's house and watched his host paint as well. Parvez noted, "It was [a] fascinating experience to study his (Shakir's) growth and watch him paint."²⁹⁴ Ahmed Parvez acknowledged Shakir's mentorship and confessed that, "in [the] early fifties he learn[ed] the language of abstract art from Shakir Ali."²⁹⁵

²⁹² Ibid., 12.

²⁹³ Anna Molka, "Ahmed Parvez," *Monograph Number Two* (Lahore: University of Punjab, 1953), 7.

²⁹⁴ Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 301.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 302.

In 1955, Ahmed Parvez became disheartened because he had not received the French scholarship that he was anticipating; he left for England to pursue his international artistic career.²⁹⁶ He returned to Pakistan in 1964 after nine years. During his time in London, his work had become well known, and he regularly exhibited his work in England. Known for his restless nature, he traveled to New York in 1966, where he lived for three years and exhibited his work in a solo exhibition at Gallery International (1968). He returned to Karachi again in 1969 and, for the next ten years, painted and exhibited regularly both in Pakistan and internationally. Ahmed Parvez died in 1979.

SECTION II

3.2 Exhibition Venues and Lahore Art Circle

LAC created a great deal of excitement in Pakistan's art and cultural sphere. LAC members reflected and refracted ideas and issues of abstraction, stylization, and aesthetics in painting. They knew that they were contributing a new language of art making to the newly established state. As a result, artists were keen to share their discoveries and progressive ideas with the general public. To develop a modern taste in the field of fine arts in the postcolonial society of Pakistan, the work of modern artists of LAC had to be made visible, which was not possible without introducing it to the general public. Therefore, exhibitions of their modern works were pivotal, requiring public venues that were easily accessible. However, venues for such endeavors were limited.

²⁹⁶ Husain, "Ahmed Parvez Writes About Himself," 12.

Since 1942, Anna Molka, the Head of the Department of Arts and Crafts (now Fine Arts), the University of the Punjab, had been holding “Annual Exhibitions of Paintings,” consisting of works of its students and staff to foster and cultivate interest in the fine arts. As mentioned in Chapter 1, after Partition, Anna Molka continued to invigorate the art activities in Lahore, bringing together artists from various schools of thought by holding several exhibitions at the University.²⁹⁷ With the founding of LAC in 1952, its member artists brought a fresh spirit to the art practices in the newly established country. Together these six energetic and ambitious artists—all interested in developing and working in varied styles—pursued the common goal of exploring and introducing a new language of art practices to Pakistan. Besides the University of the Punjab, the other exhibition venues were: Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), Alhamra Pakistan Arts Council Lahore, and The United States Information Center (USIC) – Murree Center 1952-55.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ In 1940, during the colonial India, when Anna Molka Ahmed joined the University of the Punjab to set up the department of Arts and Crafts, she was sincerely determined to promote art and she continued her focus on it even after the Partition. In her 1952 exhibition catalogue she states her agenda: “The University has two main tasks in the field of Art Education. Firstly to cultivate a taste of Fine arts and Crafts as leisure time pursuits[sic] so that public taste and appreciation is raised to a high level and secondly to provide training in painting and design for those taking up artistic career. The purpose for annual exhibitions is to arouse a healthy interest in art and a genuine desire to understand it. No book or professor can teach true art appreciation any more than a guide can climb a mountain for a traveler. We offer guidance, show the path and suggest approach to the understanding of the arts and so help the students to see, feel and think for themselves. See Anna Molka Ahmed, “How to Appreciate Art,” *Exhibition of Painting 1952*, (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 1952), 4.

²⁹⁸ Not only local artists were exhibiting at these venues. International exhibitions were also held at the University of Punjab and Alhamra Arts Council Lahore. In her 1954 report in the exhibition catalogue of painting, Molka states, A consignment of paintings from the art students of Texas University USA have recently arrived by the kind arrangements of the United States Information Center. An exhibition of these paintings will be arranged in March along with the paintings of Pakistani art students. These paintings will then be sent to Texas University as an exchange exhibition. Besides this several female students were awarded scholarships to study art and art education in England by the education department (1953-54). In

The first exhibition of modern art was Zubeida Agha's solo show held in Karachi in 1949. These exhibitions became more vibrant with the inclusion of LAC beginning in 1952 onwards.²⁹⁹ These were juried shows and included artists like Abdur Rahman Chughtai, Shakir Ali, and Anna Molka herself as the judges of the selection committee. The exhibitions brought artists with different artistic approaches together. In addition, these exhibitions were accompanied by catalogs, and they featured prizes and medals for best paintings to encourage artists. Anna Molka then invited the winning artists of various prizes and shields from the juried exhibitions for a solo show. With each show, a monograph about the featured artist was published and made available for purchase.³⁰⁰ Anna Molka herself always wrote the opening essays for these monographs and it also contained a number of black and white reproductions of the featured work, as well as critical introductions to the work of the artists, making them, in effect, the first art historical publications in the newly established Pakistan.³⁰¹

LAC not only continued to participate in these exhibitions with other artists of Lahore, but they also exhibited their work exclusively under the group's name. There are

1954, the name of the department was also changed from "Department of Arts and Crafts" to "Department of Fine Arts." Anna Molka Ahmed, *Painting Catalog* (Punjab University, 1954), 2.

²⁹⁹ Syed Amjad Ali, "Forward Looking Art: Years Before and After Independence," 35.

³⁰⁰ See exhibition catalogs of 1954, 1956, 1957, and the *Vista Magazine* publications of 1960, 1961 and 1962, which were also publications of the University of Punjab. In addition, Anna Molka authored seven monographs, on artists belonging to various school of thoughts, out of which five were on LAC members. They included artists like Ahmed Parvez (1953), Razia Ferroz (1954), Anwar Jalal Shemza (1956), Shakir Ali (1957), Sheikh Safdar Ali (1957), Hanif Ramay (1956), and Ozzir Zuby (1953). Except for Razia Ferroz, also a member of LAC, who painted in European academic style, the rest of the painters were all modern artists whose paintings were radically different from Anna Molka's own work of social realism.

³⁰¹ The author of this study considers these publications as art historical and critical publications because these were the only catalogs that gave some sort of introduction and prevalent state of art perception in the newly established state.

four exhibitions credited to LAC as a group. Not all LAC artists exhibited altogether, but they exhibited in groups of two, and three, and only once exhibited as a group of six. The first two-person show LAC held was for Anwar Jalal Shemza and Sheikh Safdar Ali at the United States Information Center Murree in 1953. The second show included Moyene Najmi, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Syed Ali Imam, Sheikh Safdar Ali, Razia Ferroz and Mariam Habib that was held in 1955 at United States Information Center Murree. The third exhibition also took place at the same venue and same year that included: Moyene Najmi, Syed Ali Imam, and Anwar Jalal Shemza. The last LAC exhibition was held at Pakistan Arts Council in 1955, and it comprised paintings by Mariam Habib, Moyene Najmi, and Sheikh Safdar Ali.

These four exhibitions received coverage in the press. The write-ups were mostly biographical and described the work as modern, but no in-depth criticism resulted. Some of the works exhibited in these exhibitions are analyzed in Section III of this chapter. Unlike the other four members, Shakir Ali and Ahmed Parvez were the only two who never exhibited their work specifically under LAC banner, but they participated in other exhibitions that were held in the University of the Punjab Lahore in 1952, 1954, 1956, and 1958. Three of the four LAC exhibitions (1953, 1955, 1955) accompanied catalogs and the one in (1958) a brochure. The exhibition catalog of 1955 and brochure of 1958 reproduced an image of the famous bronze statuette of Indus Valley civilization called *Dancing Girl* (figure. 3.1), excavated from Mohenjo-daro (British India now in Pakistan)

in 1926.³⁰² The fact that the image is produced in two LAC catalogs indicates its importance for LAC.

3.2 a. *Dancing Girl*: Logo Of Lahore Art Circle

Why LAC adapted the Dancing Girl as its logo is significant. There are different opinions about it. Pakistani writer Athar Tahir in his forthcoming work suggests that LAC adopted the Dancing Girl as their logo in the new Muslim country to boldly declare that even non-Islamic cultures are part of their national heritage.³⁰³ However, the use of the image is much more complex than simply being a claim of embracing non-Islamic cultures of the land. After its excavation, *Dancing Girl* (figure 3.2) was sent to England, along with several other objects, for an exhibition held in London at Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1931.³⁰⁴ After the exhibition, the objects were returned to Delhi, and since then they have been kept in the National Museum of Delhi. Unlike other estates, the division of artifacts from that exhibition did not take place until 1972. The former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was able to recover some of the art under the Shimla Agreement in 1972.³⁰⁵ India retained the Dancing Girl and returned the *Priest King* (another well-known object excavated from Mohenjo-Daro), to Pakistan.³⁰⁶

³⁰² The stationary (a writing pad) found for LAC, did not have the logo but just the title, Lahore Art Circle, 6 Golf Road, Lahore. Anwar Jalal Shemza used these writing pads and would write letters to his friends in Pakistan.

³⁰³ Author interviewed Athar Tahir at Kinnard College Lahore, in summer 2014. He writes about it in *Oxford Companion to Pakistani Art* (Forthcoming).

³⁰⁴ “The Catalogue of An Exhibition of The Arts of India,” Burlington Fine Arts Club, (1931): 41. The date of the return of the Dancing Girl to Delhi is not known.

The Dancing Girl is a small bronze nude figurine only 4.5” tall and depicts an image of a young girl.³⁰⁷ In her standing posture, the forward bend of the left leg and slightly backward tilt of the torso, her left arm full of bangles encasing it entirely and the other resting on her left hip, the uplifted face and torso bear a strong resemblance with a typical Indian classical dancer’s posture. The figurine is also wearing a necklace that has three elongated phallus shaped pendants. At the National Museum of New Delhi, India, the display plaque describes it as suggesting two things: one that the Indus artists knew metal casting, and secondly, the Indus society were familiar with the performing arts.³⁰⁸ In 2004, there was an outcry by Pakistani social media in an effort to retrieve the sculpture from India, but it ended up being just another topic in the complex relationship that exists between the two countries. Pakistani scholar Dr. Aijaz Anwar argues that LAC adapted the Dancing Girl as it’s logo because they were nationalist and wanted to claim the object, which belonged to Pakistan since it had been excavated in Mohenjo-Daro.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁵ Shimla pact of 1972 was a result of 1971 war between Pakistan and India, resulting in the separation of Eastern wing of Pakistan now Bangladesh. The Prim Minister of Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visited Simla on July 2nd, 1972 to sign an agreement, which laid down the principles that should govern the future relationship between the two countries. It bound the two countries to resolves their issues peacefully. Under this pact, there were several suggestions made to encourage the betterment of relationships between the two. One of them was to promote the exchanges in the fields of science and culture. As a result of which the “King-Priest,” another small statue also sent to London with the Dancing Girl was brought back from India. <http://www.stimson.org/research-pages/simla-agreement/> Accessed on Jan 23, 2016.

³⁰⁶ The debate about these art objects resurfaced in 2004, in which it was argued that the Pakistani government deliberately chose “Priest King,” over “Dancing Girl,” being a naked female statue was overtly against Islamic ideology.

³⁰⁷ The art historians describe it as an image of a young girl. (Description from National Museum, New Delhi)

³⁰⁸ In 2004, there was a hue and cry on social media to retrieve the sculpture from India, but it was a part of the love-hate relationship that exists between India and Pakistan.

³⁰⁹ Author’s interview with Dr. Aijaz Anwar in Lahore, Summer 2015.

Regardless of this debate regarding ownership of this sculpture, the more significant aspect relevant to this discussion is its meaning for these modern artists to adapt, an ancient civilization as an emblem for two catalogs. And one might ask why they chose to use the rear view of the Dancing Girl (figure 3.2)? This study suggests that LAC employed Dancing Girl as a strong personal aesthetic statement to mark their modern approach as they were establishing new and indigenous sources for their art on par with Picasso's use of Iberian sculpture. For them, Dancing Girl was modern for its abstraction and its connection with early 20th century modernism. The irony is LAC's adoption of 4,000 years old work of art as an emblem of their modern ideas.

Shakir Ali must have shared his understanding of so-called primitive art and its relation to abstract art. For him abstraction started with the Altamira caves and historically developed gradually over time in different times and cultures.³¹⁰ Renowned Pakistani art critic, Salima Hashmi knew Shakir closely, and according to her, "Shakir Ali considered Dancing Girl as one of the most modernist work of art."³¹¹ Using it as a logo could imply many things. As Shakir considered it the most modernist sculpture, it provided an ancestry and credibility for what modern constituted for LAC, which was not the mimetic representation of nature, but rather expression in an abstract manner. Dancing Girl in its abstract representation did just that for LAC.

But the question of why to use the rear view of the image (figure 3.2) raises even more questions. Could it be because the front view of the figurine depicted the naked

³¹⁰ In one of his radio interviews in Lahore with Khatar Ghaznavi and Syed Mehboob Ali in 1964, Shakir Ali was asked what was his understanding of abstract art. The interview was conducted in Urdu language, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZ_vucQBp9M, accessed on July 2014.

³¹¹ Author's interview with Professor Salima Hashmi in Lahore, Summer 2014.

slender body of a young girl with developing breasts and overt identification of female genitalia was hard to accept for a newly established Islamic society? Or it is possible that by flipping the image to its back, the posture of the figurine with a slight bend in the knee (which has been looked at as a dancing position) looks like she is walking or striding in a forward direction to imply that tradition is also moving forward like the LAC artists. Another reading could be its reversal to the Indian tradition of always having a figure face the audience, which is part of the idea of *Darshin* i.e. seeing and seeing-reciprocal exchange of gaze between god and devotee, by which the devotee earns the merit. So what does it imply when LAC reverts that notion of *Darshin* by flipping the image to its back? Such a gesture refutes the notion of the exchange of the gaze so that there is no merit given to this Hindu idea. Another possibility is that one may read the flipping of the image as itself a modern statement because the work has not been utilized as it is, but has been appropriated so that another layer of meaning can be added. Yet another reason might be that LAC artists were being cautious in their efforts to project their newfound language of modern art and did not want to offend the general public. Instead, they were carefully planting/ paving the way for the acceptance of modern art in Pakistani society, which had not seen/experienced anything like the works of LAC before in their surrounding.³¹² But their reversal to adopt this figurine might also be considered a political statement, demonstrating that ancient art from the country was not in conformity with the new Islamic conservatives, embraced by many in the newly formed country.

³¹² One must remember Zubeida Agha's first modernist solo show in Karachi in 1949 was received with much hostility. Fyzee Rahamin's wife gave rather a rude and bitter comment on the show. Marjorie Husain. Zubeida Agha: A pioneer of Modern Art in Pakistan, (Islamabad: Pakistan National Council of Arts, 2004), 20.

Dancing Girl then establishes a new tradition for Pakistan or it makes a nationalist claim, but on the other hand, it is also indicative of disconnect with the tradition. Overall the use of Dancing Girl even with the flipped image clearly indicates that their work was not a complete break from the past but rather a re-visitation of it. This approach resonates with theorist Jacques Ranciere's idea of modernity in his aesthetic regime, in which he views it not as a complete rupture from the past but a re-visitation of past is a creative concept because it enables one to understand both the art and the new world as it signifies, as a new dispensation of space and time, or the sensible.³¹³

In a time when a country was restructuring and struggling to establish day-to-day businesses, it is not unusual not to have proper exhibition venues for visual artists, because of more pressing issues at hand for the government and general public to deal with. One of the few exhibition venues available to LAC artists was the United States Information Center (USIC), Murree. Three out of four LAC exhibitions were held in USIC Murree between 1953-1955. Murree is 533km away from Lahore, a beautiful hill station and a summer retreat. Since colonial times Murree has been a center of activities in summer times when people gravitate to the hill station to get away from Punjab's scorching heat. It is also a favorite place for the Pakistani public to visit and experience snowfall in winter.

3.2 b Role of The United States Information Center Murree in Supporting Modern Art

³¹³ Jacques Rancière, *The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2006), 26.

Given that three of the four LAC exhibitions were held and sponsored by the United States Information Center, Murree, it is obvious that LAC artists had a strong support from the United States Information Center (USIC), Murree. Earlier in Chapter 2, while analyzing the affiliation of the Pakistani artists' and writers' association with the Communist Party, the interest of United States in the form of American Friends of Middle East was discussed. It has thus been already established in reference to LAC's meeting minutes of 1958 that this group accepted support from the USA in promoting their art. Dadi considers the political alliance of Pakistan with the USA from late 1940 to late 1960 during the Cold War as a force that helped shape the modern art of Pakistan.³¹⁴ He further points out that:

From the early 1950s onward, Pakistan had become a veritable Cold War proxy for the United States. Pro-United states foreign policies in Pakistan were accompanied by domestic repression of leftist intellectuals and activists including the persecution of members of the All Pakistan Progressive writers association in Lahore and Karachi, which included some of the most prominent intellectuals and writers of the country.³¹⁵

This is strange considering that a number of LAC members were leftists, Syed Ali Imam was attached to the Communist Party (from 1947-51), and Shakir admired the works of the leftists Julius Fucik and Faiz Ahmed Faiz in particular who was closely associated with LAC, yet why given these inclinations, LAC was open to US aid is puzzling.³¹⁶

There are no simple and straight answers as to why LAC was receptive to USIC and why USIC was interested in promoting modern art in Pakistan? Could it be part of the Cold

³¹⁴ Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 42.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

³¹⁶ Julius Fucik was a Czech Communist journalist whose work Shakir Ali admired and Faiz Ahmed Faiz was accused of the Rawalpindi military coup and jailed from 1951-55.

War strategy to make Pakistan an ally? Or was it simply to provide a platform for Pakistani progressive artists to practice freedom of expression? This is something that needs to be explored further in future scholarship. However, during the course of this research study, an unclassified document was recovered from the US National Archives, which sheds some light on the activities and its target service audience of the USIC, Murree. The new unclassified document dated Nov 4, 1955, describes the USIC, Murree Center and its functioning.³¹⁷ The following contains excerpts from this document, for the full document see the Appendix 3.

The Pakistan-America Society Cultural Center, Murree 1955

The Pakistan- American society cultural center, Murree was operated as a joint project between USIS- Lahore and the Pakistan – America Society of Rawalpindi, from May 1st through Sep 30 1955. This was the fourth successive season in which USIS-Lahore participated in a center in Murree. The dual responsibility was divided so that the Pakistan-America society of Rawalpindi was primarily responsible for supervising funds for the operation and USIS- Lahore for furnishing personnel for its staff to operate and jointly supervise the center.

The Center was situated in the same building on the Mall, principal thoroughfare of the hill station,[sic] that was occupied in 1952, 1953, and 1954. The entire one-story building was occupied. Its ideal construction lends itself to the center's activity and, makes it possible to simultaneously conduct a number of different activities. The large center provided a readymade theater with a seating capacity of about 100 persons for conducting motion pictures and lecture programs and other special activities accommodated in various sections partitioned section of the space were two large reading rooms, two magazine rooms, music room, motion -picture-literature storage room, a combination office and literature distribution room and a series of three private rooms, one of which was utilized as a small conference room.

³¹⁷ National Archive Maryland, (Record Identification P. 75, Country Files: 1951-1959, Box No. 1-2.

The Cultural center was widely acclaimed by Pakistanis because it constituted an island of cultural and informational activities and facilities available nowhere else in the area.

Murree draws a select group of Pakistanis from all over West Pakistan since it is the only hill station of any size where people of moderate or substantial means can find relief from the enervating temperatures of the hot season. The transient population which over a five-month period is estimated at 150,000 persons, represents a cross-sectioned of most of the audience groups that the USIS strives to reach directly or through existing by National centers.

In no other way can this important audience be reached in one concentrated effort. The hot months see normal activities in West Pakistan, except in Karachi, brought to a standstill, with all that can afford it, going to the few hill stations, of which Murree is the largest. Because diversions at Murree are limited, the Pakistan-America Society Cultural Center fills what would otherwise be a large void.

It is difficult to estimate the attendance throughout the season but it is estimated that approximately 25,000 persons visited the center. A total of 14,129 persons signed the register at the door. A sampling of distinguished visitors to the center illustrates the wide scope of the federal and provincial officials, learned scholars, and military leaders who were brought in contact with USIA Program and objectives.

...

The center was opened 6 days a week, Monday through Saturday from 10 to 1 and 4 to 8 for a total of 123 days. A special activity was held daily in the center, lectures, motion pictures, and other features.

The American Indian Handicraft exhibition was displayed from May 24 to June 13 and visited by approximately 1,500 persons. An exhibition of paintings by three young Pakistani artists was held from July 31st to August 9th. The chief justice of the Lahore high court opened the exhibition and an audience of approximately two hundred attended the ceremony. The artists themselves were active in interpreting abstract art and their paintings in particular to a constantly changing audience.

Four University of California students and their faculty advisor visited Murree from August 6th-August 10th ^{date} and through arrangements made by the center

with the cooperation of the Cantonment Executive Officer, Murree, they were able to enjoy their stay in Murree...

The document above clearly shows the American agenda, its goal and active engagement in shaping a particular kind of interest and taste among the newly established nation. The selection of Murree as a venue for target audiences— teachers, students, intellectuals—the time of the year to hold various activities in the center such as lectures, motion pictures, exhibitions and student tours. All this contributed toward fostering a modern taste and closer alliance to American culture. In addition, it supported LAC exhibitions at the Center. It must have been a fashionable and prestigious occasion for the general public to attend such events at USIC, where high ranked diplomats were invited to inaugurate the exhibitions. All of the above factors played an important role in the furthering of the contemporary taste for both American culture and modernism in Pakistan where LAC became the source that furthered the movement of modern art.

Newspaper clipping from the National Archives of the USA from *The Civil and Military Gazette Lahore* and dated Sep 14, 1955 also states:

“While reviewing in retrospect the cultural activities that have enlivened the current summer season in this Queen of hill stations, one cannot hold the unqualified tribute of admiration, which Pak-America cultural Association so richly deserved. Previously the center used to be run exclusively by the USIS but this summer it was a joint enterprise by the USIS and the Pak-American Cultural Association. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the centre, which has gone under considerable toning up this summer, was the heart and soul of cultural and literary activities. Besides Instructive film shows an up to date reading room the centre arranged talks by eminent scholars and held symposia in which the cream of the country’s intelligentsia participated to the great enlightenment of the packed audience...”³¹⁸

³¹⁸ *The Civil and Military Gazette Lahore*, “Lively Cultural Activities Praised,” Sep 14, 1955. National Archive Maryland, (Record Identification P. 75, Country Files: 1951-1959, Box No. 1-2.

The admission of an alliance called “Pak-American” culture, “Instructive films” and reading rooms are all intriguing phenomenon and need more in-depth investigation.

SECTION III

This section will examine specific themes in the works of LAC members. Analysis of the differences and similarities in the artists’ work reveal how LAC emerged as a modern group by carefully sewing the seeds of secularism in their art. They precariously developed a secular, rather than Islamic identity while cherishing their distinct and new Pakistani identity. In addition to highlighting the modernism projected by LAC, this study will question the prevalent homogenized western canon of modernism, as well as critics’ perception of the Pakistani modernism as unoriginal. Because the first generation of Pakistani modern artists utilized a range of traditional stylistic elements, with antecedents in such western art movements and trends as De Stijl, Cubism, Impressionist, and Post-Impressionism, and incorporated them in their practices to establish their own modern idiom, scholars have often dismissed the modern art of Pakistan, considering it to be merely derivative of western art movements.³¹⁹ Pakistani scholars have in turn complicated this notion by proposing that the abstract art produced by Pakistani modern artists (including LAC members) was in general in favor of the Pakistani government’s Islamic agenda.³²⁰ However, analyses of abstract works from the

³¹⁹ G. M. Butcher. “Shemza: Years in London,” *Contemporary Arts in Pakistan: A Quarterly Magazine*, 2: 2, (1961): 2. He writes that Shemza’s work before he traveled to England was imitative of western paintings and deplorable, a mish-mash of semi-realist, semi-cubist styling of Indian themes. Pakistani critics also maintained such notion of modern art of Pakistan being unoriginal.

first decade of LAC's formal establishment provide a case study that challenges such an argument. In the early 1960s, the artists Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi (1923-1987), the Pakistan's most celebrated calligraphic painter, Anwar Jalal Shemza (LAC member), Hanif Ramay (1930-2006), politician, writer and painter (who also later joined LAC), and Shakir Ali all joined the international surge of Calligraphic art. Despite engaging with calligraphic art, these artists did not use it to promote any specific religious agenda; instead, they appreciated the sophistication of form and design found in Arabic Calligraphy.

In this section, through the close analysis of work by the six founding members of the LAC, two common aforementioned misperceptions of modern Pakistani art will be addressed to assert the following:

- a) The modern art of Pakistan is not merely derivative of western art movements, but it can be classified as heuristic—utilizing an exploratory approach to examine and synthesize a range of idioms that were derived from both eastern and western aesthetics through which the artists of the newly established Pakistan strived to invent a syntax unique and modern to their country. The conceptual framework of hybridity that Homi Bhabha refers to as “liminality” or “third space” further supports the proposal that hybridity is inherent to postcolonial Pakistani art.
- b) The modern art of LAC did not in any way conform to the “Islamization” of the new nation. Rather, LAC artists very strategically positioned themselves between nationalistic and Islamist rhetoric. The art they produced was modern, as it

³²⁰ This was mostly in reference to the art produced in 1960s. However, in general no critical analysis of the earlier work of LAC artist is available as mentioned in the introduction of this study.

constituted a break from previous practices, including Allah Bux's western academic painting, Anna Molka's socialist realism, and Chughtai's gloriously nostalgic Persian Mughal style. Instead, through adapting a modern idiom of abstraction, stylization and exploration of the medium LAC engaged with the modern idiom of painting differently from the western art movements. The group was not united in promoting any one style of modernism; instead, they were united in terms of many questions they empirically posed through their art, questions that would preclude only one direction in Pakistani modern art.

3. 3 a Theoretical Framework

As briefly discussed in introduction, Partha Mitter, in his pivotal essay, *Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from Periphery*, questions crediting the western canon as the root of all modern artwork. He calls into question the "purity" and the worldwide dominance of western modernism compared to modern art produced beyond Europe and the United States, which is frequently considered a derivative exercise. He suggests shifting the prevalent, homogenous discourse of modernism to a heterogeneous one that focuses on a global modernism by including regions from around the world to produce a more inclusive art history. Mitter emphasizes, "The discipline of art history has yet to change in any substantive manner the implicit evaluation of non-Western modernism as derivative and devoid of originality."³²¹

Mitter addresses the writings of British art critic William George Archer,

³²¹ Mitter. "Decentering Modernism Art History and Avant-Garde Art from Periphery," 534.

specifically his 1959 book, *India and Modern Art*. In this book, Archer questions whether or not western modern art can be appropriated by Indian artists and, if so, in what manner? Archer used the modernist works of Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938), who was one of the first Indian artists to adapt the cubist syntax, to criticize further this idea of Indian appropriation.³²² Ultimately, Archer dismissed the originality of the work, calling Gaganendranath Tagore's work produced in cubist style as a bad copy of Picasso. Mitter argues that the overwhelming reason for Archer's dismissal of Gaganendranath Tagore's cubist work was because it was hard for a colonizer to accept that an Indian painter can use visual vocabulary of a culture to which he did not belong. In other words, Gaganendranath Tagore suffered a loss of self in becoming a colonial hybrid. In short Mitter argues that "the use of cubism, a product of the dominant West, by an Indian artist who belonged to the colonized world, immediately locked him into a dependent relationship, the colonized mimicking the superiors art of colonizer."³²³

Although Archer's criticism is half a century old, his position is still subscribed to the current western art historical canon. Moreover, non-western modern art is considered derivative not only by western critics and historians but also by those in non-western cultures. Still, the question remains; Is this perspective a long-term side effect of colonialism or are the works truly derivative? The answer to this question in reference to LAC artists work is complicated by the sheer fact that the modern art of Pakistan has not been thoroughly studied, leaving its unique qualities unacknowledged. Similar to

³²² Mitter. "Decentering Modernism Art History and Avant-Garde Art from Periphery," 537.

³²³ Ibid.,538.

Gaganendranath Tagore, LAC is not recognized for its modern work because it is also considered derivative, an unoriginal transplant, and is therefore understudied.³²⁴

However, because LAC artists lived and created art during the colonial era and after, the framework of postcolonial studies and its accompanying concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry provide an alternate lens through which the nuances of the modern works by LAC artists can be further examined.

For postcolonial theorist Bhabha, hybridity is a discourse that enables one to focus on the contrapuntal nature of cultural works in colonial and postcolonial contexts, which are critical in considering the appropriation of elements from the mainstream by either subjugated or developing cultures, as was the case in Pakistan's formative years.³²⁵ Bhabha's hybridity disrupts the colonial authority by considering it not a simple peaceful synthesis of the traits of the colonizer and the colonized. Instead, hybridity enables the colonized to challenge the hegemony and authority of the colonizer, thereby creating a third space that provides the colonized a unique voice that is his own. The notion of hybridity enables this study to undertake a postcolonial analysis of several works by LAC artists in order to pinpoint the synthesis of eastern and western aesthetics and its significance in initiating modern art different from the western art movements and its

³²⁴ Pakistani scholars generally writing about modern art try to place the modern art of Pakistan within certain western art movements or compare its creators to similar western artists whose works exhibit close similarities to the Pakistani works. For example, Ahmed Parvez's colorful abstract work produced from the late 60s to 70s in general was considered similar to the British painter Allen Davie (1920-2014). Pakistani art critics in general consider Shakir's work cubist without conducting any in-depth analysis of his work. Similarly in one of conferences in the US in which the author of this research presented a paper on the works of Sheikh Safdar Ali, a renowned American scholar questioned the quality of the work of the artist, and considered it overrated.

³²⁵ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 39.

special contribution to the art history of Pakistan.

This analysis frames LAC members' works within two distinct periods: the pre-LAC artists in colonial and emergent India (1943-51) and in the newly established Pakistan (1952-1958). The works in the second phase reflect the separation from the colonial and the establishment of a new Islamic state within the post-colonial period. It is imperative to analyze first the works of LAC artists in the context of pre-Partition India so that one can follow the paradigm shift in the works from post-colonial Pakistan.

3.3 b Pre-Partition and Pre-LAC works by LAC Artists: 1944-1947

Although not many works predate Partition and the founding of LAC, a few examples by each artist provide a glimpse of their earlier styles. The following section presents an analysis of these works to elucidate the fact that these artists were working in different styles (both learned and self-taught) before the Partition. It is important to observe the major shifts that appear in the works of these artists within the first decade of Pakistan's establishment. It must be acknowledged here that work produced between the years 1947 and 1951 have not yet been found or identified and remain a missing part of art history that could enrich and certainly nuance the study of this shift.

Chapter 2 briefly introduced Shakir Ali and his earlier work created between 1941 and 1946. A deeper analysis of his earlier painting is given here to document his in-depth understanding of eastern aesthetics and his other estimated qualifications that led to his leadership role in LAC. Shakir, who was well versed in the Bengal School style and who admired the traditional Indian miniature painting and Ajanta cave paintings, had

developed a distinct style of painting. One of the rare example of this work *Untitled*, (figure 2.2), is a 16 x 14.5-inch (close in size to traditional Indian miniature painting) gauche on paper. Dated between 1940 and 1943, it indicates Shakir's mastery of the Bengal School Style, but with naturalistic elements. The painting is an idyllic residential village scene viewed from above. Multiple scenes within the composition show various activities happening at the same time. The picture plane is divided into sub-spaces by diagonal placement of huts, forming a spiral pattern. The arrangement of cows and human figures forms another spiral pattern that parallels the huts. An equal number of figures and cows crowd the foreground of the painting.³²⁶ The figures and cows are rendered in silhouettes and devoid of any detailing; they resemble cutouts but are naturalistically rendered. Most of the figures are painted from behind and few are shown in profile, because of which there is limited amount of facial details. In characteristics that are typical of the Bengal School, the figures almost have touches of naturalistic rendering. In the late 1930s, Bombay was under the stronghold of Bengal School, which countered the J. J School of Arts and its emphasis on that had added European naturalism.³²⁷ Shakir at this time was studying at the latter of the two schools and this painting reflects his hybrid style that developed in his earlier training in Ukil's studio at the Bengal School combined with his learning of European prudent at J. J. School of Art. The painting, in its overall effect, looks like an Indian miniature painting, but subtle nuances separate it from traditional painting. For example, the division of space within

³²⁶ Unfortunately, the color version of the image is not available; therefore, the color cannot be discussed here.

³²⁷ Simone Wille, *Modern Art in Pakistan* (Routledge, India, 2015), 18.

the picture frame of an Indian miniature painting is more strictly horizontal and vertical, using geometric lines of architecture to divide spaces (Indian Miniature painting from Memoir of Babur, figure 3.3). Additionally, the gouache technique Shakir uses differs from the painstaking *pardagh* technique of a traditional Indian miniature.³²⁸ In fact, Shakir's painting has more similarities with sixteenth-century Japanese scroll painting in which isometric perspectives were used to depict fully the elements of a given scene (figure 3.4).

As in isometric perspective, all lines of the individual huts are parallel. There is no horizon line and no vanishing points. There is also not a fixed or limited viewpoint in the painting; instead, the perspective shifts throughout the entire composition, enabling the viewer to see the front, side and top of the huts at the same time (See figure 3.5-drawing of an isometric hut). Traditional Japanese scroll paintings emphasize expressive, diagonal lines and isometric perspectives. In Shakir's painting, the diagonal arrangement of huts, animals and figures emulates Japanese scroll painting, which is also seen in the works of Gaganendranath Tagore and Abanindranath Tagore, who were also deeply influenced by the Japanese aesthetics.³²⁹

In comparison, Anwar Jalal Shemza's painting *Couple* (figure 3.6) is a 16"x19" gauche on paper painting dated between 1944 and 1947 and looks similar to Shakir's

³²⁸ *Pardagh* is a technique in which layers of colors are applied in a pointillist manner to achieve the excellence of fine rendering.

³²⁹ In 1902 Rabindranath Tagore had invited a Japanese Scholar Okakura Kakuzo(1863-1913) to India. Upon his return to Japan, Kakuzo sent two Japanese artist Yokoyama Taikan (1868-1958) and Hishida Shunso (1874-1911) to India, played an important role in exchanging techniques with Abanindranath Tagore. For detail see, Jaya Appasamy. *Abanindranath Tagore and the Art of His Time*, 36-38.

Untitled painting (figure 2.2). However, Shemza's *Couple* is not a miniature painting. The size is comparatively larger than a typical miniature. The painting emulates the Bengal School style and Chughtai's Mughal-Persian aesthetics seen in *The Last Days of Shah Jahan* (figure 1.10) and *Heeraman Tota* (figure 3.7), which exhibit a hybrid style of traditional Indian and Persian miniature painting with hints of naturalistic renderings. The scene in Shemza's *Couple* (figure 3.6) is a close up of double portrait, showing a male and female in a loving posture. The depiction is unusual and looks like a photographic close up of a detail in a traditional painting. The light-skinned female's face overlaps the dark-skinned, male, and the green background behind the couple simulates the texture of a leaf.

The male behind the female is caressing her chin with his right hand, and the female places her left hand next to his left hand, which is resting on her left shoulder. Both faces are tilted diametrically opposite of each other. The half-closed eyes, small pouting lips, and long sharp nose evoke the compositional and stylistic features of Ajanta cave paintings (figure 3.8). The eyes of the couple are positioned diagonally as are in faces. The colors used in the painting are earthen and, have been applied flatly, without any tonal variation, as would have been a typical characteristic of Bengal School. A darker outline is used to define certain parts of the body to give it more naturalistic touch, for example, the lines on the neck of the female indicate skin folds due to the tilting of head on her left side. The red *bindi* (dot) on the woman's forehead and dotted line along her eyebrows suggest that she is Hindu.³³⁰ The depiction of the couple as types rather

³³⁰ Wearing *bindi* is a specific ornamentation used by women who are Hindus.

than specific portraits may also refer to such a Hindu mythological theme as Ram and Sita. In short, the painting clearly reflects Shemza's training at the Mayo School of Art and Craft and his excellent draftsmanship.³³¹

In the pre-Partition Indian subcontinent, Ali Imam worked in a naturalistic style that was completely different from Shakir's and Shemza's approach. His training at the J. J. School of Art where European academic naturalism was taught is reflected in his painting *Shashi* (figure 3.9). The dimensions of the painting are unknown, however, it is known that this is the earliest work of Ali Imam, made before the Partition. The woman depicted is Ali Imam's classmate and love interest, a Hindu named Shashi.³³² Although the technique and style is western naturalistic academic, the medium of painting is watercolor, which is traditional in India. The relaxed posture of the young woman sitting against the wall, resting her elbow on a wooden stool, shows the able skill of the artist. The fluidity of the watercolors compliments the material and rendering of the flowing folds of the young woman's *sari* (a traditional wrap-around dress). Overall the painting has an economical approach with the hands of the figure lightly painted with minimal details visible in the face. The expression, character, and age of the young woman, however, are remarkably candid. Unpretentious the work reflects the spontaneity of the medium and Ali Imam's observational skills. The background of the painting is rendered as a filler so as to focus on the main character, which monumentally occupies the picture plane.

³³¹ Shemza must have taken up the style from studying under S. N Gupta, who taught at Mayo School of Art and Craft from 1929-1942.

³³² Mrs. Ali Imam informed the author that Shashi was another reason Ali Imam did not want to leave India at the time of Partition. Interview with the author, January 2015 Karachi, Pakistan.

Sheikh Safdar Ali's earlier works were also naturalistic but not as sophisticated as Ali Imam's because Sheikh Safdar was self-taught and acquired his skills by practicing drawing and painting on his own. He also had professional experience in designing film sets for Bombay Talkies before Partition. As the film set designs and background paintings required a certain kind of *naïvetés*, simplicity and exaggeration, these qualities are reflected in Safdar's early work. His painting, *Untitled* (figure 3.10) is an example of his early landscape paintings from the late 1940s, and contain a mixture of naturalistic and abstract renderings. His treatment of space in this painting is mostly two-dimensional. The mountains in the background are thickly outlined in a slightly darker color. The scene depicted is schematic and might have been rendered from memory, thus denying European close observation of specific scenes. This work exemplifies Safdar's early abstraction, and his thick application of oil paint similar to that of the Post-Impressionist painters. The use of Masonite board and oil paints were also considered western commodities.³³³ This particular representation of landscape dwells somewhere in between the ideal and the familiar; in a sense it is neither purely abstract nor naturalistic but rather the synthesis of the two.

Similar to Ali Imam and Safdar, Ahmed Parvez was inclined towards European academic training in his earlier work. As mentioned earlier in Section I of this chapter, Ahmed Parvez was trained under his uncle Michael Jacobson who adhered closely to Eurocentric naturalism, with the result that this approach was a determining force in

³³³ See Chapter 1 for detail on Swadeshi movement (1905-11), against colonialism resisted use of western product. The Bengal School of Art rose during this time and condemned the European academic style, including discouraging the use of oil and canvas. Instead, the local indigenous folk style of Kalighat painting promoted use of traditional gouache on paper.

Ahmed Parvez's earlier works. His work, *The Touch*, (figure 3.11) conceived in pastels on newsprint and dated between the years 1951 to 52, won him the Punjab University Shield for Men for the best work of art in 1952. Unfortunately, the image has only been reproduced in black and white, therefore, it is difficult to assess his use of color in the work. The painting is painted in a loosely gestural expressionist style. The material used for this work is unconventional and modern. This use must be an adoption from the West because pastel on newsprint was not a local practice or considered a serious artistic medium at that time. Parvez's choice of materials reflects his modernist approach toward making art. For him the medium and its formalism do not hold any importance, it is his drive to express that is most important.

The Touch, (figure 3.11) depicts a young boy looking down and lovingly caressing the hair of a lady who rests her head with closed eyes on his lap. The relationship between the two is ambiguous. The boy seems to be younger than the female, whose neck is stretched, leaning toward her left side. The subject of the painting and the posture of the two figures are not even traditional. It seems close to life in its human rendering but at the same time its casualness also makes it modern. The softness of the pastels very much comes through in this image. There are no harsh outlines but in some places soft thick lines have been used to emphasize certain forms of the body and to separate the figures from the background.

The analysis of the works above demonstrates that LAC artists before Partition were either painting in the style of Bengal School or following the European academic prototype. In the next section an analysis of works will demonstrate that the

establishment of LAC in 1952 resulted in a major shift in the works of LAC artists, and the establishment of Pakistan factored in this change. Instead of carrying on with the existing tradition, LAC members bonded together as a group and chose to direct their work toward the international art scene. The analysis of the paintings produced after the founding of LAC is predicated on Shakir being the only artist of the group who had first-hand exposure to western art. The other members were only familiar with the art and practices in Europe through books available in the British library Lahore. Shakir served as their eyes for the western world, once the resulting art was different from anything produced in Lahore at the time.

3.3 c. Paradigm Shift: Towards Abstraction

According to Bill Ashcroft, scholar of English literature and postcolonial studies:

Postcolonial cultures are inevitably a hybridized phenomenon involving a dialectic relationship between the ‘grafted’ European cultural systems and an indigenous ontology, with its impulse to create an independent local identity. Such constructions or reconstructions only occur as a dynamic interaction between European hegemonic systems and peripheral subversions of them. It is not possible to return to or rediscover an absolute pre-colonial cultural purity, nor is it possible to create national and regional formations entirely independent of their historical position in the European colonial enterprise.³³⁴

Homi Bhabha argues that the colonial authority is disrupted by ambivalence, which is characteristic of postcolonial discourse. It is evident in the ambiguous way in which colonizer and colonized regard one another. As discussed in the introduction, the colonizer often regards the colonized as inferior and exotically other, while the colonized regards the colonizer as desirable but at the same time unscrupulous. Bhabha considers

³³⁴ Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 195-6.

this mix of attraction and repulsion as a complex characteristic of the relationship between colonizers and the colonized. This affiliation is ambivalent because colonized people are never simply and completely opposed to colonizer forces. Rather than assuming that some colonized subjects are “complicit” and others “resistant,” vacillation suggests that complicity and resistance in a fluctuated colonial subjects.

Ambivalence also characterizes colonial discourse since those who are subjected may be exploited and nurtured at the same time,³³⁵ creating an unwelcome and unwanted aspect of colonial discourse because colonizers often have wished to produce compliant subjects who “mimic” the habits and values of the colonizer. Instead, such practices create ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never very far from mockery. Bhabha suggests that:

It is in this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that examples of imitation come. Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slipping produced by ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same but not quite) does not merely “rupture” the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a “partial” presence.³³⁶

By “partial” Bhabha means both “incomplete” and “virtual.” Mimicry may seem to be involved with imitating and copying, but it actually emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. It thus becomes the sign of a double enunciation; a complex strategy of reforming, which appropriates the “other” as it,

³³⁵ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, quotes Homi K. Bhabha in “Postmodernism and Post-Colonialism,” 13.

³³⁶ Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” 126.

visualizes power.³³⁷ This aspect of mimicry acts as a double-edged sword; while colonized people might mimic their colonizers (and in the process the colonized are alienated from their own language, representing their liberty), they also produce parodies that may result in mocking their colonizers. Mimicry repeats but do not re-present, and so the colonized ones try even harder to achieve equality and authenticity.

Colonizers want to disseminate knowledge to their colonized subjects by producing “a class of interpreters among the colonized,” who in turn becomes the tools through which the colonizers can operate. The process is akin to producing a buffer zone between the colonizer and the colonized, as noted earlier in the introduction, T. B. Macaulay’s infamous words, in which he expresses the desire to produce such mediators who replicate the colonizers to the extent that they are just functional under the colonized. In his words, “a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions in morals and in intellect.” They are never equal and the same to the colonizer because the colonizers never want their colonized subjects to be exact replicas of themselves, as this situation would be too threatening to their ultimate authority. Thus, the success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate actions that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace. Examples of such an effect have been pointed out by a number of scholars. In reference to Macaulay’s famous minutes, Loomba opines that what mimicry essentially means in the context of India is that Indians can mimic but can never exactly reproduce English values, and their recognition of the perpetual gap between themselves and the “real thing”

³³⁷ Ibid.,127.

will ensure their subjugation. But for Bhabha, this inequity undermines colonial authority, since it is unable to replicate itself, therefore, it is a failure on the part of the colonizer.

Before analyzing LAC artworks, it must be noted that in the postcolonial society of Pakistan, a group Macaulay referred to as “ Indian in color and blood, but English in taste and opinions,” popularly known as “Brown Sahib” exists and ironically filled the absence of colonial authorities. After the withdrawal of British rule from India in 1947, the brown sahibs continued the British system in Pakistan by perpetuating the language and practices of their former colonizers. This approach may be understood better if one recognizes that the governmental and the educational system in both Pakistan and India follow even today follow British colonial Indian models. Similarly, in the field of fine arts with the beginning of colonialism in India in the mid-18th-century, the introduction of art schools and the beginning of art exhibition culture were themselves western implants.³³⁸

Besides being artists, LAC members’ diverse adjunct professions such as being film set designer, book cover designers, and textile designers enabled them to bring western commercial art practices into Pakistan. LAC artists were claiming modernism not just in their aesthetes and styles but also in their daily jobs. It is notable that all of them very consciously dressed in the western business attire of three-piece suits as can be seen in photographs of the artists, printed in their monographs and other exhibition publications (figure 3.12). The widows of Ali Imam and Moyene Najmi have stated that

³³⁸ Rebecca Brown. *Art For A Modern India: 1947-1980* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2009), 10-15.

their husbands were conscious about their dress and deliberately made an effort always to dress in a suit before embarking to their studios for painting.³³⁹ In addition to their conflation of making art with business attire, these artists' visits to the Pak Tea House and the Coffee House to participate in lively debates with writers and poets was in no way indicative of tradition, but of modernity. So, in a way, these artists availed themselves of the opportunity to establish themselves in a new country as modern intellectuals who were different from the majority of middle-class Pakistanis. Shakir was already imbued with maintaining aspects of a western lifestyle, having lived, studied, married to two western women, and worked in the West. Dalmia considers the exchange and diffusion of influences among various cultures of the world to be such a worldwide phenomenon that one needs to go further and characterize the choices that are made and the reasons for doing so. She writes:

Cultural diffusion is a universal phenomenon that cannot be privileged in any way as the exclusive domain of any country. It is far more fruitful to examine in what sense art is borrowed, and how it is unvested with meaning.³⁴⁰

In agreement with Dalmia, this study analyzes several LAC works in order to understand what they have borrowed from western art movements and how they have reutilized them to create hybrids, their unique idioms of modernism in Pakistan. The story of modernism in the context of Pakistan did not proceed in any neat fashion. Recounting its narrative involves an understanding of the political and social conditions produced possibilities, inconsistencies, disruptions, and jumps in works of art. Thus, there is not a neat order that

³³⁹ Mrs. Ali Imam recalled that Ali Imam always dressed in spick and span pant shirt early in the morning before he began his day. Similarly, Mrs. Attia Najmi stated that when he dressed up in his suite, she knew he was ready to paint.

³⁴⁰ Dalmia, *The Making of Modern India*, 48.

would guide and define what the modern artists were following in terms of subject matter, style, and technique. LAC explored a variety of subjects while still discovering the formal aspects of an art derived from western genres (still life, landscape, cityscape and figurative) and stylistic conventions, including abstraction and naturalism, which were modern conventions. Although there is no linear progression in the production and development of modern syntaxes in the works of LAC, there are certain patterns enabling one to follow the development of their modern style. For the sake of developing a cohesive narrative in this study, a thematic organization has been created, based on chronology, of works produced between 1952-58. It is important to note that this grouping of themes does not in any way imply that LAC followed a strict and rigid strategic plan. In fact, their experimentation was fluid, and they continued to move back and forth between the diverse techniques and subjects that frame their modern approaches as well as their shift between various styles, thus their approach to exploring the modern idiom in painting was experimental.

Still Life

Still life as a subject within the modern trend marks the beginning of a new genre in the South Asian subcontinent. This genre does not exist in the history of Indian painting, but actually belongs to the western painting tradition. South Asian, more specifically, Pakistani modern artists used the still life genre as a strategy to engage in a dialogue with international modernism.

Shakir's earlier work from 1952 (when he arrived in Lahore) shows his experimentation with still-life painting. Shakir was against the inclusion of narratives in his work. Exploration of pure form and color was what interested him the most. He was more concerned with exploring the relationships between line, color and form, and he explored them in his still life paintings. In one of his interviews with art critic Anwar Sajjad, Shakir expressed the following view about his work: "In my work, I believed the real deal is the form. I am against the idea of storytelling in a painting. Painting should not create any story. In my paintings, I am concerned with color, line, and their interaction with each other."³⁴¹

In his *White Vase* (figure 3.13) from 1952, a white thickly painted vessel is the most prominent element and is positioned in the middle of the foreground, in front of rectangles and trapezoidal shapes. A black outline defines this central form and separates it from the background. There are leaf-like, webbed stems issuing from the vase. On its left side, two heart-shaped leaves are suspended in the composition. In this work, the *White Vase* is the only definitive form and is the focal point of the painting as it leads the eye towards the middle ground and then into the background, simultaneously simplifying and obscuring the painting. The thick application of oil paint and use of semi-abstract forms give the initial impression of a simple still-life composition, but upon closer observation they reveal a complicated image.

³⁴¹ Dr. Anwar Sajjad "Interview with Shakir Ali: Black, Green, Red," *Shakir Ali: Art and Personality (Shakir Ali, Fun aur shakisiyat)* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1995), 208-10.

The thick paint in the painting reinforces the idea of modern because this kind of painting practice did not exist in the East and seems to mimic western Impressionism.³⁴² The overall painterly consistency of the work, which exhibits a wonderfully dry wit in terms of presenting a painting of a vase, positioned against other paintings by Shakir, so that the idea of painting itself is layered or staggered. Shakir's objective was not to present the viewer with an easily read still life, but to provoke curiosity and to compel one to think about the meaning of the painting, thereby providing an art-for-art's-sake orientation to this work. Therefore, the subject of *White Vase* is art itself. This aspect of Shakir's work may be attributed to his learning from his teacher André Lhote. In her book *Modern Art of Pakistan*, Simone Willie references André Lhote's book *Traite' du Paysage*, when describing his philosophy about modern art. She states:

Lhote speaks of the essence of art, saying that it should not imitate nature, but rather its laws and 'under the guise of imitation stir up excitement with pure plastic elements: measurements, directions, ornaments, light, values, colours, substances, divided and organized according to the injunctions of natural laws.'³⁴³

In *White Vase* (figure 3.13), the contrasting earthen colors of Indian red, sea green, and shades of ocher are juxtaposed against each other, while flowing from one shape to the other. This compositional strategy conforms to Shakir's idea of the interaction and play of line, color and form in a work of art. The use of oil paint and abstract shapes in the painting alludes to the western, mainstream School of Paris art. Shakir's intention was not simply to replicate the practices of western art. Instead his use

³⁴² In the Indian traditional painting watercolors are applied in thin layers.

³⁴³ André Lhote, *Treatise on Landscape Painting* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1950), 37, quoted in Simone Willie. *Modern Art In Pakistan* (India: Routledge, 2014), 21.

of bright, bold earthen colors in the abstract shapes and forms outlined in black, as well as his treatment of space as two-dimensional on the canvas show his intentional synthesis of the modern language of abstraction with the Indic tradition of Ajanta cave paintings.³⁴⁴ The effect of Shakir's hybridization is apparent as his work cannot be categorized as completely western abstraction or eastern tradition; this ambivalence allows him to invent his own syntax in which he comfortably moves in between the two, thus creating, in Bhabha's terminology, a liminal space, a unique fluid state that enables him to move flexibly in between two cultures and occupy an in-between, threshold or "third space." As Homi Bhabha states, "It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of ourselves and others, and by exploring this 'third space' we may allude to the politics of and emerge as the others of ourselves."³⁴⁵

This third space enables Shakir to produce works of art that refer back to his own art at the same time it resonates with aspects of western and eastern culture. In Bhabha's words: "The intervention of this 'third space of enunciation,' which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code."³⁴⁶ Thus, Shakir's work exhibits a nuanced trajectory of experimentation and liminality that does not specifically and openly allude to either cultures but offers a new visual syntax for younger generations of artists.

³⁴⁴ The outlining and bright colors juxtaposed next to each other, was a typical characteristic of Ajanta Cave Paintings and Shakir during his student years had visited the caves.

³⁴⁵ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies*, 209.

³⁴⁶ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 37.

Shakir's work must be a model of experimentation for his other LAC fellow artists. As a counterpoint to Shakir Ali's work, Sheikh Safdar Ali's *Still Life* (figure 3.14) seems to include shapes and forms that are more schematic and consequently easier to recognize, however, the work has its own distinct character. In Safdar's *Still Life* the picture plane is divided and subdivided into several different planes and spaces by black outlines of geometric shapes. Safdar experiments with cubist sensibilities in which the still life does not show one perspective, but presents the objects from multiple perspectives. For instance, the top and side of a black-outlined plate, holding two fish and two lemons, can be seen simultaneously as flat and also three-dimensional. The fish and lemons almost look three-dimensional with skillfully blended strokes of various tones of gray, yellow, and green; however, the black outline around them gives the objects a two-dimensional cutout shape and deprives the objects of depth and dimensionality. The carefully placed jug with a black design along its lip, located on the left side of the painting, appears to be painted from the artist's eye level as well as from above the jug. The strokes of the brush sometimes follow the round form of the jug, however, the handle is painted in flat patches. The black outline around the jug defines and flattens the shape. In the center of the painting, there is a picture frame, the inside of which is painted with ambiguous, abstract shapes that could be viewed as a human form, foliage or something else. Whatever the form, this part of the painting contains the most dynamic, abstract piece of the composition and becomes one of the focal points of the painting. It also compels a viewer to question what the painting within the painting means. Perhaps the

abstract painting within the painting alludes to a more complicated idea of a world within a world? Similar to Shakir, Safdar's painting is about painting.

Still Life (figure 3.14) looks like a scene of an interior space, and all the objects are clustered closely together on the edge of a table. The window in the background highlights the foliage on the top right of the painting, which is ambiguous since it may be inside or outside. The schematic leaves are carefully painted in an alternating pattern of darks and lights as an integral element of a well-thought-out composition. This painting is one example of Safdar's work in which the components of the design, such as shape, line, and color are all mutually reinforcing and dominant. The thick outlines of objects in the painting resonate with the eastern stylistic tradition of Ajanta cave paintings (figure 3.8), and the 20th-century paintings of Jamini Roy based on Bengali folk art (figure 3.15), even as they betray an understanding of a generalized cubist vocabulary. However, what differs from tradition is the placement and relationship of one object to the other. Like Shakir's *White Vase* (figure 3.13), Safdar's still life also questions a straightforward representational narrative. Unlike Shakir's *White Vase* (figure 3.13), however, the objects in Safdar's painting are more easily recognizable in their shapes and forms, despite the impractical placement of objects. Both Shakir and Safdar were not interested in conveying a narrative of art about art. This painting is one example from Safdar's series of still lifes and depicts a hybridization of eastern and western artistic sensibilities. Similar to Shakir's work, Safdar's hybrid trajectory is not only indicative of the "third" space that offers an innovative visual language but also the fact that the artist did not want to dwell in the past. However, in doing so Safdar did not completely reject tradition.

Instead, he was struggling to find a balance to move forward in the modern world with new sensibilities, a goal that demonstrates the progressive attitude of the Pakistani artists. Safdar at the time had no first-hand exposure to western mainstream art trends; his familiarity with Shakir's *White Vase* (figure 3.13) may have inspired him to experiment with this genre as well. Through the hybridization of the eastern and western aesthetics, Safdar creates that liminal space in his work that carries the subtle informed knowledge of both the East and the West. Given the fact that Safdar at that time only had second-hand knowledge of western art movements, this work demonstrates his desire to explore and experiment what was once only the domain of his colonizer.

Shemza similarly provides a distinctive exploration of space and form. His *Still Life with Red Vase* (figure 3.16), dated 1953, is one of his rare paintings of the genre. The rectangular painting is comprised of a big, red vase on the left side of the composition, which complements the green background of the painting. The focal point and background of the composition are similar to those seen in Safdar's *Still Life* (figure 3.14), which is divided into several rectangular shapes. Yet, a sharp green triangle pierces downward into the composition while two other adjacent triangles complete the rectangle shape. The red vase, although painted in round form, has been inspired by cubism. The diamond-shaped mouth of the vase is painted from as if it has been viewed from the top. Four thin blade-shaped leaves with three other heart-shaped yellow leaves rest in the red vase. The three yellow heart-shaped leaves with a recognizable mid- and sub-veins are from a tree indigenous to the Indian subcontinent called *pipal* or *bodhi* tree (*ficus*

religiosa). The inclusion of these leaves from the bodhi tree grounds the work specifically in the geography of the Indian subcontinent, thereby localizing it.

The black outline that was obvious in Shakir and Safdar's work is also dominant in Shemza's composition. However, the flat application of color throughout the painting is unlike Shakir and Safdar's thick application of paint and may be a reflection of Shemza's commercial art training at Mayo—the effects of which are also seen in the previously discussed work *Couple* (figure 3.6). A small pattern in the dark green triangle on the right side of the painting alludes to a pattern found on pieces of pottery discovered in the Indus Valley; like the leaves, this pattern localizes his exploration within the western genre. For Shemza and other LAC artists generalized cubist-inspired forms and flat color naturally provided a common visual language for then undertaking diverse explorations of subject matter. For both Safdar and Shemza, the division of the picture plane into several shapes was the beginning of their individual styles that continued with the use of the grid in their work. The modern element is to be found in their simplification of forms and their use of mundane objects in paintings enables them to break with the established hierarchies of established eastern traditions. Thus, the adoption of a subject matter, and the abstract rendering of objects within the picture frame may allude to artists' mimicking the western tradition of still life, but the use of foliage and traditional pattern indigenous to the subcontinent grounds the work back in the region, making the work ambivalent. This slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry in

Bhabha's words is "almost the same, but not quite, which not only rupture the discourse, which shows a partial presence of the colonial subjects."³⁴⁷

The last two artists for this section's discussion are Ali Imam and Ahmed Parvez. Ali Imam's *Still Life* (figure 3.17) and Ahmed Parvez's *Still Life* (figure 3.18), both dated around 1953, are strikingly similar to each other. At first glance, they look like two works by one artist. Unfortunately color images of the paintings are not available, but even in the grey-scale photo-reproductions of the paintings, a black outline dominates both compositions similar to Shakir, Safdar, and Shemza's still lifes.

In Ali Imam's *Still Life* (figure 3.17) a number of bottles, glasses and fruits are placed on a surface against a flat, blank background—unlike Shakir's *White Vase* (figure 3.13), Safdar's *Still Life* (figure 3.14), Shemza's *Still Life With Red Vase* (figure 3.16) and even Ahmed Parvez's *Still Life* (figure 3.18). The objects in the painting have soft as well as harsh angular lines that define their shapes. All of the objects are painted the same size, making their placement and perspective consequential. The fruit dish, wine glasses and whisky bottle and the soda spritzer bottle in the painting are not local, but foreign implants. It must be noted here that in the Islamic state of Pakistan the public use of alcohol is not allowed. Muslims are not allowed to buy, sell or consume alcohol under any circumstance, as Islam prohibits the consumption and business of alcohol. The depiction of such prohibited and restricted objects, to which common or working class people did not have access, may be a deliberate depiction of a foreign subject rather than a commentary on religion (the "progressive" modern artists of Lahore were westernized

³⁴⁷ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 126.

and were not engaged in religious debates). Nonetheless, liquor bottles, glasses with grapes and fruit dishes were, strangely enough to western and eastern eyes, radical subjects in a new Islamic state.³⁴⁸ The use of whiskey and soda spritzer bottles in this work as a subject matter is indicative of the artists desire to mimic the western lifestyle and thus, the post-colonial condition.

Besides the similarities in subject and style to Ali Imam's *Still Life* (figure 3.17), Ahmed Parvez's *Still Life* (figure 3.18) exhibits a black outline that varies in thickness and is more organic. The overall treatment of objects in terms of their size and placement recalls Ali Imam's *Still Life* (figure 3.17), but the background of Ahmed Parvez's painting is quite different. A window in the right side of the composition is balanced by a painting of a boat on the left side. However, the painting is much larger than the window. A single dice is positioned on the round table, shown in an isometric perspective along with the fruit dish, which is similar to the one in Ali Imam's *Still Life* (figure 3.17). One may wonder how both artists came to use very similar props. In some ways the depiction of such objects is indicative of the bohemian and avant-garde group to which the artists belonged, thereby distinguishing themselves from Islamic religious adherents by being open and receptive to modern commodities and western ideas.

In considering the still lifes of the modernist Pakistani artists, Shakir Ali, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Sheikh Safdar Ali, Ali Imam and Ahmed Parvez, this study contends that the artists chose the genre of still life because it did not exist in the East and belonged to a

³⁴⁸ This restriction of alcohol is due to religious reasons as Islam prohibits the consumption and business of alcohol. The only people who have the flexibility to use alcohol in Pakistan are non-Muslims who must obtain a license to buy alcohol.

long-standing tradition in western painting. In the West, it had been employed in a number of ways. Seventeenth-century Dutch still lifes depict commodities manufactured by the East India Company and other such concerns, in addition to celebrating the good life and providing cautionary reminders of its brevity, while painters like Cézanne and Van Gogh painted still lifes to explore form, color, shape and light. However, in the context of Pakistani artists, still-life painting did not present prosperity, nationalistic agenda or Islamic tendencies. Instead, it was used as a means for experimenting with abstraction and for inventing a new modern language in Pakistan.

The outstanding characteristics in the analysis of the paintings above are the multiple views, lack of shadows, use of strong outline to define objects and the painting-within-a-painting motif. Although LAC artists borrowed the genre of still life from the West, they did not strictly follow the rules set in western art movements like Cubism. They adapted the still life genre because the subject matter provided them with freedom to experiment and explore media and the syntax of modernism without confining themselves to a specific narrative. LAC members resisted prevalent oriental practices, but they did not completely break away from tradition. The multiple perspectives in their paintings can be seen as mimicking western cubism, but may simultaneously refer to the multiple perspectives used in traditional Indian miniature painting. Miniature painting often used multiple perspectives to elaborate the painted narrative; while the modern practices of the LAC artists moved away from the narrative tradition. LAC artists tried to carve out modern sensibilities without the restrictions imposed by eastern or western tradition, thus, their resulting works are hybrids that create room for them to reflect their

own voice and celebrate freedom of expression in their work. Bhabha notes that “hybridity is such a partial and double force that is more than mimetic but less than symbolic, that disrupts the visibility of the colonial presences and makes the recognition of its authority problematic.”³⁴⁹ LAC artists’ decision to adopt selectively the vocabulary of modernism, in which not one specific medium, mode, style, or movement is employed but instead combinations of their selections from a number of approaches are then synthesized, thus destabilizing the authority of western aesthetics. Hence, their works problematize subsuming them under distinct western art movements.

Ideas bounced back and forth between LAC members; one member would propose an idea and others would respond to it through their work, thus initiating a painted discourse on specific topics and approaches. Their ongoing artistic conversations account for similarities, as well as differences, between paintings by LAC artists.

Landscape/ Cityscape (1952-55)

Shakir Ali was interested in exploring the idea of space within the painting, and most of his work created between the 1960s and early 1970s examined this concept. Unfortunately, only one example of his earlier way of working with landscapes is available to analyze in order to ascertain how he dealt with the issue of modernism in relation to space. His work from 1949, titled *French Landscape* (figure 3.19) was made during his time in the south of France at André Lhote’s studio where several other Indian

³⁴⁹ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 111.

artists in Europe joined his Academia Montparnasse.³⁵⁰ At Lhote's studio Shakir experienced the mainstream Cubism at first hand. Oil paint became his medium of choice, though his intention was not to achieve the same effects seen in the western painting of the time, but to use bright colors, black outline and two-dimensional space according to the Indic tradition seen in Ajanta and Ellora cave paintings. It must be noted that when Shakir joined Lhote's studio he was already well versed in the Bengal School style as well as western academic painting style. In fact, he already had attended the Slade School of Arts in London. Synthesizing his earlier traditional training with the western sensibility of abstract shapes, planes, and forms created a hybridization of the two, and thus offered a new visual syntax of experimentation, which became an example for his fellow LAC artists. Hence, Shakir's hybrid use of the two traditions dislocated it from the temporal, spatial, and geographical context, thus opening it to exist in the liminal space.

The *French Landscape* (figure 3.19) is an abstract cityscape, composed of a hodgepodge of tightly interlocking forms and shapes defining a relatively shallow space. The various planes comprised of different angles of architectural structures provide a cubist-like view of shifting perspectives. These planes are outlined with thick, dark, and organic lines that distinguish one shape from the other while also tying them together. The bright thickly applied paint colors are juxtaposed next to each other and show an amalgamation of many western art movements including Fauvism, Cubism, and

³⁵⁰ According to Partha Mitter After independence, many members of Bombay Progressive; Akbar Padamsee (1928), Jahangir Sabavala (1922), Ram Kumar (1924) worked under Andre Lhote, Mitter also mentions that Zubeida Agha was also one of the artists who worked at Lhote's studio. However, Pakistani scholars and critics claim that she actually studied at the Ecole De Beaux, Paris. Mitter, *Indian Art*, 206.

Expressionism. Ambiguous forms on the bottom-right corner of the painting create a mystery but work cohesively to create rhythmical movements in the painting.

At first glance, *The French Landscape* (figure 3.19) does not reflect Shakir's previous training in Indian aesthetics, but upon closer examination, the use of a strong black outline and well-mixed colors (Indian red and blue) distantly recalls Persian miniature paintings. It seems like Shakir adapted the modern language of abstract painting but could not abandon Indian conventions of color and use of line. Shakir's work illustrates how Bhabha's explanation of the difference between mimicry and mockery can work. Bhabha notes that mimicry acts as a double-edged sword for the colonized—one side mimics the colonizer and while alienating the colonized's own language of liberty. This two-fold operative produces a parody that is not the same as its original sources. The classification of Shakir's work as mimicry, however, requires further consideration as it can also be analyzed as a progressive process that allows the artist to adapt the western aesthetics as part of the mutual exchanges that make up the experiences of this individual.

In contrast to Shakir's *French Landscape* (figure 3.19), Shemza's painting titled *Lightness and Darkness*, (figure 3.20) is a completely abstract view of a cityscape. It must be noted here that Shemza like his other LAC artists is producing the work in Pakistan without having experienced at first hand the modern art trends of the West. His only access to western art movements was through books, or Shakir's work and personal views.³⁵¹ The image shows an abstract jumble of interlocking shapes that form a

³⁵¹ When Shakir moved to Lahore from Europe he did bring along his works. *The French Landscape* was in his possession in Lahore, later acquired by one of his student Ijaz-ul Hassan, who also joined LAC later on.

residential house. These geometric shapes suggest architectural elements, including a gabled roof in the middle of the painting, the staircase in the lower half of the image, and a lamp on the left side of the painting. The structure looks as if it has been constructed from cut-paper patterns. The gabled roof of the house presented here is not indigenous to the Indian subcontinent, however, in hill stations (small towns cresting hills) like Murree, the British established residential houses styles that emulated English homes. Shemza and his other artist friends had briefly spent time teaching drawing at Lawrence College in Murree. Additionally, Shemza's childhood was spent in Shimla (now part of India), which is also a hill station. This painting may depict his memory of living *in* such a house as multiple interiors and exterior views of the house are juxtaposed next to each other. This may allude to the multiple views in Cubism but does not point to a specific kind of Cubism. Shemza's relationship to this style may be similar to Gaganendranath Tagore's, which is described by Partha Mitter: "Tagore admired the movement, yet felt distanced from it culturally, making it perfectly clear that he was not seeking to reproduce the French Cubists."³⁵² Likewise, Shemza may have adapted parts of Cubism to create his own language.

The painting is also more refined in its design, use of color, and craftsmanship than Shemza's earlier still life painting (figure 3.16 discussed above). The dominating qualities of graphic design and shapes defined by complementary colors distinguish Shemza's work among the other LAC artists. One aspect that cannot be ignored while examining his work is that *Lightness and Darkness* (figure 3. 20) also presents a radical

³⁵² Mitter, *Decentering Modernism Art History and Avant-Garde Art from Periphery*, 539.

shift in Shemza's work as offered by a landscape unfamiliar to the general public. Even though Chughtai's painting represented a romanticized view of space, Shemza's cityscape presents architectural elements (the gabled roof, and stairs not indigenous to Pakistan) as emblems of modernism as they appeared to be universal forms. This modern visual vocabulary must have been seen as strange and unusual, given that the public was not acquainted with such modern artwork or western architecture.

Similar to the genre of Still Life painting, Landscape painting is also not indigenous to the Indian subcontinent even though the topic of land divisions became highly fraught before, during, and after Partition. As a genre of painting, landscape is a legacy of British colonialism, brought to India by European academic painters. Safdar's work *Untitled* (figure 3.21) shows a radical shift toward abstraction and is a complete break from his earlier painting, including the still life *Untitled* (figure 3.14). The *Untitled* (figure 3.21) landscape is also very different from those produced by his other LAC colleagues. The painting shows a rectangular picture plane with varying patches of green juxtaposed against a strong black grid; the composition alludes to an aerial view of the landscape. The strong black outline divides the picture plane into an irregular grid pattern and the application of thick paint with dynamic brush strokes creates various textures that define the spaces. These divided spaces may allude not only to the demarcation of the land experienced by India and Pakistan at the time of Partition but also to the resulting demarcation of space emerging after the formation of two new countries. Or they may have been interpreted in this way. These rigid lines not only stretched across countries, regions, and local areas but also were internalized in terms of the new boundaries in

people's hearts and minds. The modern grid pattern becomes the most prominent feature of his work. In this abstract landscape, it can also be understood as referencing the four-thousand-year-old grid planning of the Indus Valley civilization, a proud heritage of Indian subcontinent (figure 3.22). However, the way Safdar renders the landscape is a complete break from even the western naturalistic landscape.

Created simultaneously with the abstract landscape painting *Untitled* (figure 3.21), the subject, style, medium and technique of the painting *Sisters* (figure 3.23), is different, representing two traditional women in a pastoral scene. In *Sisters* (figure 3.23), the painting depicts two seated Indian women with traditional village architecture in the background of the scene. The painting resembles traditional folk painting by Jamini Roy (figure 3.15) in its use of simplified forms, rhythmical black outlines that surround the facial features of the two women, yet the treatment of the sky, the sun and a huge bird looming in the background is abstract and modern. Safdar's back-and-forth switch between complete abstraction and the incorporation of traditional folk elements demonstrates his anxiety and desire to experiment in order to locate his own voice, which is neither of a repressed colonial nor of a blind imitation of the colonizer.

Ali Imam's *Murree* (figure 3.24) and *Black Moon* (figure 3.25), as well as Moyene Najmi's *Neela Gumbudh* (figure 3.26) and *Old Lahore- I* (figure 3.27), show the similar stylistic progression of the two artists from picturesque landscapes to urban cityscapes. Ali Imam's explains the progression of his work:

I use to paint landscapes in Lahore and street scenes of the interior of the city. I painted Pindi, and Murree. I did the same thing in Bahawalpur and Multan, the old houses and derelicts places and my work got repetitious. One day Shakir Ali got very angry with me, "what is this romantic flirtation with watercolor, painting

the obvious. Why don't you study Cézanne?" I studied Cézanne but it was Gauguin and Van Gogh that were very dear to me. They communicated and talked to me but Cézanne left me cold. I stopped painting and took books from British Council library and studied Cézanne but it took me three years before I really understood the great master. Eventually, it was the Multan and Bahawalpur houses that brought me into modern wavelength. Where the nature of things was modern you copied them and they become cubist houses and modern paintings. Not that I understood cubism then, but I decided I would leave Pakistan and go abroad to widen my experience of art and life.³⁵³

Ali's account clearly indicates that Shakir was very vocal in his critique of fellow artists, and guided them in a direction that he thought would benefit them. Ali Imam's earlier paintings of landscapes of Murree were sumptuous watercolors, sometimes transparent and other times opaque. Looking at the landscape painting *Murree* (figure 3.24) within the larger context of visual expression reveals that no particular element in the painting locates the painter or landscape within Pakistan, even though the landscape of Murree, as seen in a recent photograph (figure 3.28), looks like Ali's painting.

Colonization during the British Raj shaped the landscape of Murree. The local hill station accumulated snow in winter, therefore, gabled roofs was a common architectural feature of the hill station. At one point Murree housed some of the most important foreign offices.³⁵⁴ Ali Imam, and A. J. Shemza lived and taught drawing at Lawrence College in Murree, and would host artist friends who visited from Lahore. The United States Information Center was stationed in the town, which was the venue for three of the four LAC exhibitions.³⁵⁵ Therefore, Murree held a special place for LAC. The style of *Murree* (figure 3.24) is post-Impressionistic with elements of naturalism and abstraction. Unlike

³⁵³ Husain, *Ali Imam*, 39.

³⁵⁴ Farukh A. Khan, *Murree: An Overview* (Lahore: Tropical Printers, 2013), 25.

³⁵⁵ See the Appendix 3 attached, which shows the importance of Murree.

Cézanne, Ali Imam does not build up the forms with layers of color, instead, he uses darker outlines to define the shapes of buildings and trees, a feature that comes from the Indic painting tradition. Ali Imam uses bright transparent colors that give an impression of the Fauvists movement in the West. One may think that Ali Imam is mimicking Fauvism when first glancing at this painting; however, his use of watercolors is exaggerated, but local, unlike the expressive Fauvist painters. In addition, his brushstrokes are not as prominent and impulsive as those found in the works of members of this European group; instead, wet-on-wet colors flow and interact in Imam's painting. Although *Murree* seems to be close to Ali Imam's naturalistic style as seen in his pre-Partition *Shashi* (figure 3.9), it is, in fact, in-between, being a mimetic and abstract representation of landscape. It is neither fully naturalistic because of its strong outlines, somewhat under-painted quality, and the spontaneous vibrant colors, nor is it completely abstract because of definite representational landscape, but a hybrid of the two.

Moyene Najmi's painting *Neela Gumbdh* (figure 3.26) is comparable to Ali Imam's style, but oil colors on canvas are used instead of watercolor in Post-Impressionistic style. Dark outlines define architectural features in Moyene Najmi's painting of the bustling and famous main square of the city Lahore known as *Neela Gumbdh* (figure 3.26). The square was the heart of Lahore and the Pak Tea and Coffee House were located nearby. The artists' decision to paint scenes of actual places that were important to them is understandable. *Neela Gumbdh* (figure 3.26) is modern in a sense that broke from painting practices of the time. The gestural and spontaneous quality

of the painting emulates the western Post-Impressionist style while the representation of an actual place in Lahore grounds it in a cultural context.

The works *Murree* (figure 3.24) and *Neela Gumbdh* (figure 3.26) show the engagement and dialogue between artists and the development of their later modernist styles seen in the cityscapes *Black Moon* (figure 3.25) and *Old Lahore- I*, (figure 3.27). Both the latter paintings were featured in a three-person exhibition in 1955 at United States Information Center, Murree. Both works show the artists' radical shift from their previous styles. Ali Imam's painting *Black Moon* (figure 3.25) presents an imagined scene of crowded abstract houses in a congested setting. Although no color image of this painting is available, the title of the painting *Black Moon* clarifies that it is a night scene. The houses are painted in rigid geometric shapes with straight lines. The cityscape is devoid of shadows and human figures. Ali Imam's architectural painting shows a strange perspective; at first glance it appears to use one-point perspective (with the vanishing point in the middle of the painting), but the houses maintain a uniform size throughout. In principal, they should appear smaller as the perspective moves toward the vanishing point, or if it was meant to be reverse perspective, the houses should become larger towards the vanishing point. The painting, however, exhibits neither, thus inventing something completely different that does not exist in any known aesthetic approach, thus making the artist's style unique.

Unlike Ali Imam, Moyene's cityscape *Old Lahore- I* (figure 3.27) depicts the heavily populated location of "Old Lahore City." Moyene selectively chose a portion of the city and painted it in isolation with bright, contrasting colors. He combined modern

straight-edged architectural elements with traditional *jharokhas* (windows). A strange mysterious light illuminates the street, creating two contrasting yellow-and-black trapezoidal shapes at the bottom of the building's side. A striking similarity in both paintings (figure 3.25 and figure 3.27) is the rendering of the moon. An organic shape frames a full moon on the left side of each painting. Works by both artists bear a similarity to those by Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico's (1888-1978), which conveyed pro-surreal and uncanny aspects in their depictions of deserted cityscapes as in *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* (figure 3.29). These Pakistani artists were not exposed to de Chirico's work, but certain elements and archetypal traits appear in cities around the world regardless of their geographic location. This commonality, however, is most often framed within an art historical narrative that purports a flow of "influences" from the West to the East.

The deserted architectural structures in both *Black Moon* (figure 3.25) and *Old Lahore- I*, (figure 3.27) looks like a cardboard cut out, which seems weightless and almost floats in the space. In both paintings, dark painted patches give the notion of windows without any details indicate that they can be opened. Moyene Najmi's painting also reminds one of a film set design, completely aloof and standing alone with no connection to reality, something that exists between fiction and reality. The architectural forms in Ali Imam's landscape *Murree* (figure 3.4) and *Black Moon* (figure 3.25), Shemza's cityscape *Lightness and Darkness*, (figure 3.20) can be found anywhere in the world but Moyene Najmi's cityscape *Neela Gumbdh* (figure 3.26) and *Old Lahore- I* (figure 3.27), are very strongly grounded in the region of Indian subcontinent, and

unmistakably Pakistani landscapes. Even as Moyene's later works become more abstracted and fragmented, they still referenced particular historical sites, including Mughal Gardens and Mosques. In comparison to Ali Imam's *Murree* (figure 3.24) and *Black Moon* (figure 3.25), Moyene Najmi's *Neela Gumbdh* (figure 3.26) and *Old Lahore-I* (figure 3.27), Sheikh Safdar's *Untitled* (figure 3.21), and Shemza's cityscape *Lightness and Darkness*, (figure 3.20) exhibits more abstract designs. Hybridity dominates the cityscapes of Shemza, Ali Imam, and Moyene Najmi, sometimes in the use of color, forms and structures thus synthesizing the western abstraction in general with actual local places. Similar to their experimentation in *Still Life*, it is difficult to pinpoint and situate the works of art in a specific eastern or western movement. It, however, offers hybrid reading of the aesthetics.

Like works of the four LAC artists discussed above, the multiple perspectives found in Ahmed Parvez's painting titled *Houses* (figure 3.30) can be aligned with cubist sensibilities or the Indian miniature painting tradition. The painting shows several forms constructed by combining angular geometric shapes. A viewer who is native to Lahore might interpret the scene as a painting of the congested interior of the city, but several elements challenge this interpretation. First, the forms do not look like livable spaces, but an impression of such spaces. The dark and light colors form a pattern rather than following any rule of chiaroscuro that might suggest natural shadows. Forms in the painting offer multiple views, but they do not exactly follow the abstract perspectives of Cubism or Indian miniature painting. The multiple perspectives Ahmed Parvez used in *Houses* (figure 3.30) do not support a narrative, as is the case in miniature painting,

which employs multiple perspectives to fully present a scene or event in multiple spaces. For example, a room will be depicted with all four walls, roof, and floor laid out in a two-dimensional space in order to view all of the details in the narrative on one surface. The use of Indian red and blue brick textures in *Houses* (figure 3.30) is typical of Indic tradition. The painting clearly shows Ahmed Parvez's evolution from the naturalism in his earlier prize-winning painting *Touch* (figure 3.11) to his adoption of modern abstraction. Ahmed Parvez could have easily continued his success, having already mastered skill necessary in naturalistic painting, but his urge to experiment and move toward abstraction shows his curiosity and progressive approach in embracing the modern language. Ahmed Parvez notes:

Today I also stand free from the boring traditional mental images. Of course with an abstract painter any freedom from second-hand images, is not instinctive, as with the child or savage, but as brought about by a conscious effort to free himself, so that he may see the world or have the inner vision as with newly opened eyes.³⁵⁶

The statement expresses the freedom he felt after taking up the new language, which he found to be much more exciting as it offered him more to explore and express. Yet, his knowledge of the visible world helped him express his inner unseen world.

Summary

Looking at the genre of landscape/cityscape as it appears in the works all five artists are exploring, one may contend that there is a visible transformation in their works from earlier still-life paintings, which marked the beginning of their awareness and

³⁵⁶ Marjorie Husain. *Ahmed Parvez*, 12.

experimentation in the modern art. The progression and development of LAC demonstrate their passion for speaking a universal language that could be communicated through visual art, so that they could participate in the larger international community of modern artists. The gabled roof houses in *Murree* (figure 3.24) by Ali Imam and *Darkness and Lightness* (figure 3.20) by Shemza could be seen as universal archetypes of the modern world despite the fact that the artists painted structures that actually existed. Shemza's *Darkness and Lightness* (figure 3.20), Ali Imam's *Black Moon* (figure 3.25), Moyene Najmi's *Old Lahore- I* (figure 3.27), and Ahmed Parvez's *Houses*, (figure 3.30) engage with the sensibilities of modern art rather than traditional styles. This change can be seen in the rendering of architectural forms, the varying levels of abstraction, and the surreal atmosphere in the painting. The combination of eastern and western architectural forms that are not restricted to a certain style or tradition places all the paintings "in between" the perspective of the traditional miniature painting and western cubist planes. The paintings are therefore hybrids that occupy a liminal space, hence, provide LAC artists to invent and express their own understanding of modern art.

Figurative

In a radio interview, Shakir stated, "Although I have learned from different teachers, different kinds of art, I find myself attached to abstract art. It allows one to express a mood which can be about the social condition or atmosphere, rather than narrating a story."³⁵⁷ Shakir was an accomplished painter of various styles including the

³⁵⁷ Interview of Shakir Ali with Syed Mehboob Ali and Khatar Ghaznavi on radio Pakistan 1964.

Bengal School and European academies, yet he was attracted to abstract painting, which he discovered during his time spent in Europe. Shakir felt that abstraction provided him with a freedom of expression that was not available in his earlier training when working in traditional Indian painting styles, which required artists to follow traditional aesthetic rules. Upon arriving in Lahore, Shakir was vocal about his views on modern art and abstraction as an important genre. His position as one who had already received aesthetic training in both the East and the West, gave his position credibility and importance. He then, as mentioned earlier, attracted and inspired younger artists who believed abstraction to be the way forward in the modern world.

The third section of this dissertation's analysis demonstrates how LAC artists incorporated and experimented with figures in their work. This genre is especially important because it shows that LAC artists did not follow Islamic proscriptions against the use of iconic images when representing the human figure. In fact, a number of works by these artists, which will not be discussed in detail due to the limited scope of this study, will clearly point to the liberal positions taken by LAC members in their art making. For example, a work by Ahmed Parvez shows a nude figure in the background of his portrait (figure 3.12). Anwar Jalal Shemza's works *Couple* (figure 3.31) and *The Kiss* (figure 3.32) present abstract male and female figures in intense emotional positions. Similar figures appear in Shakir Ali's paintings *Reclining Nude* (figure 3.33) and *Standing Nude* (figure 3.34).³⁵⁸ Keeping in mind the conservative era of the 1950s, these

³⁵⁸ The image by Ahmed Parvez was published in Anna Molka's monograph in 1953. Anwar Jalal Shemza's works were also published in his monograph by Anna Molka in 1956. Shakir Ali's monograph dated 1957, also included reproductions of *Reclining Nude* and *Standing Nude*.

works demonstrate the rebellious side of these artists, who refused to confine themselves to Islamic conventions and, in fact, denied acceptance of Islamic rules, including labeling LAC members Pakistani Muslim artists.

As previously mentioned, common themes and subjects in each genre facilitated an ongoing conversation between LAC members that reflected their individual understandings of modernism. A recurrent theme, *Mother and Child* was painted by Shakir Ali, Ahmed Parvez, Anwar Jalal Shemza, and Sheikh Safdar, though each painted it in a very different way. Another common subject was the representation of two young girls, which were painted in works of Sheikh Safdar's *Untitled* (figure 3.42), A. J. Shemza's *Seven and Eleven* (figure 3.43), and *Anarkali* used by both A. J. Shemza and Moyene Najmi (figure 3.44 and figure 3.45 respectively). The commonality of themes and range of styles in this genre reflects the dialogue between the artists through their works and their development of individual styles rather than upholding a monolithic movement.

Shakir Ali's painting entitled *The Bull* (figure 3.35) and dated 1952 points to his strong sensibilities as a textile designer. Shakir was formally educated as a textile designer at Charles University, Czechoslovakia, from 1950 to 1951 where he had the chance to observe the textiles of the Indian subcontinent on display at the local museum. *The Bull* (figure 3.35), is a square painting that has a tile-like quality and could be viewed, if one wished, from any direction. However, the title of the work plays an important role in grounding the subject matter and directing the viewer in deciphering the image. Finding the bull in the painting is a challenge, and it almost seems like a game of

“I Spy.” If the painting is divided in half, its right side seems charged, showing the bull in action, digging its left leg into the ground, ready to attack or run. The left side of the painting, however, is more ambiguous. Close examination of the painting overall suggests an enlarged mask-like portrait of the bull. (See figure 3.36). The image has been simplified using the program Photoshop to trace and study the painting. The arrangement of curvilinear shapes, combined with various other organic shapes and forms, are enhanced with the use of vermilion red, which unifies the painting but also complicates the individual forms within the image. It is hard to trace and separate the forms, as they tend to weave in and out of each other, thus eliminating a predictable pattern or order and bringing the visual to a play of line, color, and form. This is a recurrent theme that Shakir explored in many of his paintings. Scholars have associated his use of the bull with Picasso, the caves of Altamira, Greek mythology, the walls of the Cretan palace, and rural Pakistan.³⁵⁹ In the context of the Indian subcontinent, the bull has a divine status referring to *Nandi* (*vahana* or mount of *Shiva*); its depiction in the Indus valley also seals its significance in the agrarian society of India. To conclude, it may be contended that the use of the bull refers simply to its use in cultures all around the world, thus pointing to a universal idea. In style, *The Bull* (figure 3. 35) looks like a continuation of Shakir’s experimentation as seen in his still life *White Vase* (figure 3.13), in which the eastern and western aesthetics culminated to define his hybrid style.

³⁵⁹ Marcela considers Shakir’s use of Bull in his paintings to be derived from several different references including Picasso, or Caves of Altamira, Greek mythology, Walls of the Cretan palace, or the rural Pakistan. Marcela Sirhandi. *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan*, (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1992), 44. Akbar Naqvi, Simone Willie, and Dadi have also agreed to such reference.

Shakir did not follow an orderly trajectory in his experimentation with subject matter. As previously suggested, Shakir's choice of the still-life genre was not about representing a specific theme but to facilitate experimentation. A clear shift occurs in his work when he painted *Mother and Child* (figure 3.37) in 1952.³⁶⁰ *Mother and Child*, which has Christian connotations and has been repeatedly painted and sculpted in western art, and was depicted by Jamini Roy's in the Kalighat style of painting (figure 3.38). However, Shakir's painting of *Mother and Child* (figure 3.37) is significantly different from Roy's painting as well as his own previous work. First, his painting does not show a happy relationship of a mother and child but perhaps depicts a mother lamenting the death of her child. The lifeless arm of the child dangles in the left side of the painting and resembles Michelangelo's *Pieta* (Fig 3.39). Secondly, its rendering diverts from his own previous painting style, in which his animated brushstrokes bleed into adjacent shapes; in *Mother and Child*, the colors are tightly restricted to rigid geometric shapes. The painting is composed of several large geometric shapes rather than his previous soft organic forms. These forms fit together as puzzle pieces but do not provide an easy clue how to match its various parts if taken apart, which would be a difficult process, one based on the idea of guessing which shapes fits with what to complete the forms. Each of shape is divided into two parts, one slightly simpler than the other. For example, the portrait of the mother on the right side is made of simple, flat sub-shapes, reducing it to the essential silhouettes, like shapes forming a portrait in profile. The left side, however, is treated quite differently. The half face has only an eye added to it. Similarly, the torso of the

³⁶⁰ It is the same year when Shakir also painted his *White Vase* still-life, discussed earlier.

child's body is slightly round and divided in the middle. The drapery on the right side is depicted, through very simplified, of curved lines that extend all the way to the bottom of the painting. This painting, instead of depicting a hybrid of aesthetics from the East and the West, shows his amalgamation of two disciplines as a designer and a painter.

Although the painting is very different from Shakir's previous works, his experimental elements of line, color, and form, continue his modern international dialogue. The new and modern qualities of this work lie in its visual transcendence of specific times and places. Although Shakir denied using any kind of narrative in his work throughout his artistic career, the titles of his paintings from the late 1950s (*Mother and Child*, *Leda and Swan*, *Europa and the Bull*) recall various mythological narratives. His use of a theme with Christian connotations in a newly established country that claims to be an Islamic nation-state is also notable, and it must be noted that artists like Allah Bux and Abdur Rahman Chughtai painted Hindu themes before Partition.

Like other members of LAC, Shakir did not settle for a signature style. This interest in continual development and change could be due to Pakistan's status as a new country that struggled to establish its own cultural identity among a number of possibilities. In response, some artists tried to establish themselves in the international art scene. By the mid-1950s, Shakir's work took yet another turn. His painting titled, *The Man with the Cage* (figure. 3.40) and dated 1956, shows his shift from the hard-edged, fragmented geometrical shapes seen in *Mother and Child* (figure 3.37) to soft contour lines. This new approach of capturing the figure is much more organic, following the natural soft contours of the human body. Shakir's application of paint is expressionist

while his color palette is rich Indian earth colors. The background of the figure is divided into rectangular shapes, and the abstract form of the male figure is positioned on the left side of the painting towards the edge. A bird and a cage sit in front of the figure and the variable black outline defines the figure, the bird and some parts of the cage. Although Shakir repeatedly discouraged the idea of narrative in paintings, it seems to become part of *Man with the Cage* (figure. 3.40). The relationship between the man, the cage and the bird inevitably develops into a narrative unknown. The figure with his right hand in the air and left hand resting on his left thigh is either coaxing the bird to fly away or to jump into his right hand or perhaps he is simply conversing with the bird. The bird is painted in an archaic form, and whether the bird is inside or outside the cage is unclear and creates an ambiguity. The form of the cage with its rounded top and thick bars resembles a typical Indian parrot cage (figure 3.40 a) and the figure's sitting crossed leg posture is also indigenous to India.³⁶¹ However, the image is abstract enough to be understood universally. Dadi suggests that, "For Shakir Ali, the simplified and abstracted shapes of the figure, the bird, the cage, the moon, and flowers were metaphors for human finitude and its transcendence through art and imagination."³⁶²

The painting exhibits a modernist play between the obvious and ambiguous in the display of the bird and cage; figure and bird, which creates mystery rather than a single concrete idea, plays with the imagination of the viewer and allows for open-ended

³⁶¹ It is a common Indian tradition to sit crossed leg on the floor to eat, relax, and to perform yoga.

³⁶² Dadi, *The Art of Muslim South Asia*, 130.

interpretations. Shakir had a special infatuation with birds and considered them a metaphor for a free spirit. He writes:

Each one of us is born with a bird, free unfettered, reaching out for the infinite. But owing to the prejudice of our civilization, the restriction of our families and the superimposition of convention, that bird is caged and loses its notes of freedom. I am trying to find that bird in men. And if I do, I will pass it on. That bird will go right from me to you.³⁶³

As noted earlier, Shakir's years in the Czech Republic and London exposed him to western literature. He was especially touched by the writings of Julius Fucik (a Czech Communist journalist) and Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry, which had a profound effect on his work. Shakir was not only a painter but also a writer and a thinker. The hybrid style and content of his work often raised profound questions rather than dictating simple answers.

Significant works by other LAC members also emerged during this time period. Sheikh Safdar Ali's earlier experimentation with grid patterns that appeared in his still life *Untitled* (figure 3.14) and later in his landscape painting *Untitled* (figure 3.21) was fully developed by this time and became one of the most recognizable characteristics of his work. He further developed the idea of the grid, using it to merge the landscape and figure into a unified composition. This cohesiveness was his unique contribution to the modern art of Pakistan. *Untitled* (Fig. 3. 41) indicates the extent of Safdar's progression from the somewhat comprehensible grid in *Landscape*, (figure 3.21) to a completely abstract composition. The background of the painting is painted in various tones of green,

³⁶³ Original quote is in Urdu by Shakir Ali in his essay "My Art," published in Shakir Ali, National Council of Arts, 1986, p. 16. English translation by S.Amjad Ali. *Painters of Pakistan*, Golden Graphics Ltd, Karachi, Pakistan, 1995, p. 119.

which is then superimposed on a strong, black, geometric, grid-like structure. The female figure is entirely fused with the grid, making the lines and figure inseparable. The presence of female figures only becomes noticeable with a careful study of the painting, revealing certain embellishments of traditional, eastern female figures, such as the hint of a nose pin and earring on the right side of the painting. Safdar's *Untitled* (Figure 3. 41), exhibits his continuous quest to find a distinctive idiom, one that is neither completely eastern nor western, but instead a hybrid that reflects both. Although the use of the grid and the abstract landscape seems to come from western modern art movements as if he was trying to mimic the western art, his use of visual elements that are specific to the Indic region grounds his work in the locality of the Indian subcontinent. The use of geometric shapes and colors bear strong witness to Safdar's calculated sensibility of balance as a designer.

Another of Safdar's works *Untitled* (figure 3.42) is very similar to Anwar Jalal Shemza's work *Seven and Eleven* (figure 3.43) in subject matter. They were both painted between 1953 and 1956. Two young schoolgirls, possibly sisters because of their resemblance, are the focus of the paintings. The girls are positioned in full face (staring back at) the viewer. The arrangement in both paintings is same: the younger girl is positioned on the left side of the painting and is shoulder-to-shoulder with the older girl shoulder, on the right side of the painting. Both girls in *Untitled* (figure 3.42) wear the same kind of clothes in the paintings, perhaps school uniforms. Both pairs of girls wear their hair in braids. In both paintings, the skin color on the right side of the figures' faces, necks, and arms is darker than that on the left side. This difference may be an abstracted

representation of chiaroscuro; a design element that may be reflecting the darker and lighter sides of the girls' personalities; or a half-dark, half-light compositional element that is similar to Shakir's treatment of his painting *French Landscape* (figure 3.19) and *Mother and Child* (figure 3.37). The possibility also exists that Safdar and Shemza were painting from live models and included the way in which the light in the room fell on the girls. Although the theme of both paintings is urban (selected either because of some kind of popular prevalent news, or story or simply the availability of models), and the arrangement of the figures in paintings is the same, the artists' treatment of paint and styles are very different from one another. In Safdar's *Untitled* (figure 3.42) the slightly elongated oval shapes of the faces and the facial features of the young girls have been rendered in a somewhat naturalistic manner, but their large eyes, sharp noses, long necks, and pouting lips bear a strong resemblance to the ideal figures in Indian miniature painting. The body forms below the necks are quite defined. The scene behind the girls is complex and is divided and re-divided into many rectangular shapes and three circular shapes, which are further divided into several rectangles. These shapes are juxtaposed against one another in the background and even cover the top of the girl on the right side of the painting. The color palette for the painting is made up of cool colors. The black outlines as always prominent in the Safdar's painting.

In contrast, Shemza's painting *Seven and Eleven* (figure 3.43) render the girls in a more abstract manner. The faces are horizontal ovals and doll like; the eyes, nose, and lips are rendered as if painted on dolls or mannequins. The necks are extremely long, and the bust is reduced to large rectangular shapes. Just around the necklines is a delicate

chevron pattern, which breaks the monotony of the simplified shapes. The background is very simple and divided into rectangles; the bigger rectangle on left side exhibits narrow vertical lines that give the impression of a *chik* (a traditional window blind made of bamboo). While the story behind the two girls may remain unknown, the similarities in the two paintings are striking. The two girls stand staring at the viewer, as if ready for a camera click—a modern stance. The unremarkable background enhances the other design elements in the painting but is different from the traditionally painted backgrounds in which more information would be given about the subjects to further narrate the story. In this case, however, the narrative is obscured. Each viewer can then weave his/her own narrative based on the limited information provided in these two open-ended paintings.

Another interesting aspect of the works by LAC artists was their engagement with popular culture. In 1955, two of the artists—Anwar Jalal Shemza (figure 3.44) and Moyene Najmi (figure 3.45)—painted works with the title *Anarkali*. They were both responding to the film of the same name.³⁶⁴ *Anarkali* was a fictional character from a famous Urdu drama written by Imtiaz Ali Taj (1900-1970) in 1922. *Anarkali* (literally meaning “bud of pomegranate”) is a romantic play based on a quasi-mythical legend of a beautiful courtesan, who falls in love with a Mughal prince, Akbar. As a result, she is banished from the court and cemented in a room behind a wall. *Anarkali* is the most celebrated legend associated with the city Lahore. A bazaar in Lahore is named after her, and a mausoleum in the middle of the city has a Mughal-era sarcophagus with *Anarkali*'s

³⁶⁴ The movie *Anarkali* was under production in the 1950s and released in June 1957. The artists must have been familiar with its making because Moyene Najmi's brother was the renowned Pakistani film actor Aslam Parvez. The Tea and Coffee Houses, as noted earlier, were also meeting places for writers, artists and poets in the city.

name on it.³⁶⁵ The building became the official government of Pakistan's office in 1947 (now known as the Secretariat, it houses all the important government documents), and it was also the location where Pakistan's flag was first raised at the time of Partition. Because the movie was in production, it must have been a popular subject of conversation to which the artists may have wanted to respond. Moyene Najmi and Shemza both painted *Anarkali* give a personal interpretation of the historical character's story. In fact, Shemza painted the theme again that same year in *Portrait of the Anarkali*.

Shemza's *Anarkali* (figure 3.44) presents the black-and-white image of Anarkali in an eloquent abstracted form that stands tall in the middle of the painting. Unlike a naturalistic rendering of the female body, the female figure presented is made from the juxtaposition of simple abstract shapes, though they still express the delicacy of the female form. The figure looks modern and elegant, even in her posture, and the rectangular shape at the back of the figure's head constitutes her long hair, which may place it in a traditional context. The triangular shapes on the female body give the impression of western attire; her left-hand rests in her pant's pocket, and her right-hand pushes the curtain away. A crescent moon on the left side of the painting adds romance to the night scene.

The background of the painting is simply divided into large geometrical shapes. Overall, the figure looks positive, which is emphasized by the gesture of the tiptoeing feet. The woman is gazing upwards at the sky through the curtain that her lover has

³⁶⁵ Author has not seen the sarcophagus because it is placed in a building holding government records and is not accessible to the public. The building itself has an interesting history as it has gone through several renovations in various time periods.

pushed away. Although the title of the painting *Anarkali* particularly suggests its context as Indian, the image is modern not only in its use of abstract shapes to define the form but also in the fact that Shemza gives the traditionally tragic story of Anarkali a happy ending. Since Shemza had a long-standing career as a writer, he wrote several novels, radio plays and short stories in which he altered folk tales to give them new and modern twists. For example, his play called *Heer Ranjha* borrows a legendary story from the region of Punjab.³⁶⁶ In the story, a young beautiful couple in love is tragically separated due to differences in caste and class. Many beautiful songs were written to commemorate the tragedy of the lovers.³⁶⁷ Shemza appropriated the play and set it in modern times. Shemza writes a happy ending for the story in which Ranjha is able to convince Heer's father to give her hand to him. Shemza's intellect as a writer and an artist compelled him to look inward to his own tradition, and he attempted to reinvigorate stories by setting them in the modern world. He thereby challenged the existent histories.

In contrast, Moyene Najmi's *Anarkali* (figure 3.45) is painted in a traditional Indian romantic posture. The standing female figure is framed in the center of the painting. Her right hand holding something to her nose as if smelling it, her left hand holds the transparent veil that covers her head. Examples of traditional Indian miniature painting include such portraits of women standing in the same posture and often holding a flower in their hand (figure 3.46). The facial features of the female figure have been rendered in a classic Indian style—the face in profile with a thin nose, small mouth and

³⁶⁶ Shemza wrote this radio play in the same year 1955, when he was painting *Anarkali*.

³⁶⁷ Singing the story of *Heer Ranjha* has become a genre in singing called as reciting *Heer*, which is a monolog of the young woman narrating the tragic event of her separation from *Ranjha*. It is considered as the most beautiful sweet and sad story to which the voice of singer actually brings people to tears.

large eyes looking into the distance. The bust of the figure occupies three-fourths of the painting and twists toward the viewer, placing her bosom in full view. Moyene Najmi does not use naturalistic foreshortening in aligning the body of the figure with the side pose of her face. Similarly, the figure below the waist is also in profile. The figure wears Mughal traditional attire, a long tunic extended down to knee length and slippers. Similar to Shemza's painting of *Anarkali* (figure 3.44), a crescent moon occupies the background of Moyene Najmi's version (figure 3.45) along with simple rectangular shapes.

The most intriguing part in the painting is the placement of the figure in a cube-like structure, which may give the overall impression of cubist tendencies or refer to the trapping of Anarkali behind a wall in accordance with the legend. The overall impact of the painting gives both a traditional and modern first impression. Similar to Shakir's *Man with the Cage* (figure 3.40), Moyene's application of paint is also expressionist, creates a rich textural surface and the layers of contrasting colors show through each other, thus enhancing and complementing the figure. Moyene Najmi did not create as many paintings as his LAC colleagues, but he displayed exquisite control of his medium. The very few paintings that he made mostly include architectural structures, but this particular painting is one of his rare figurative works. The subject matter is from Indian history, and Moyene Najmi used traditional elements in his painting, but his and expressionist application of paint and the treatment of space (specifically the dividing and re-dividing of the picture plane into geometrical planes) make the *Anarkali* (figure 3.45) hybrid and modern.

Eve after the Fall (figure 3.47) is a painting by Ahmed Parvez that exhibits a generalized School of Paris style that is very different from his fellow LAC artists. The title of the painting refers to a specific narrative and the monumental woman, standing on the right side of the painting and facing the viewer, holds a sheet of fabric up to her chest. The scene conforms to the title's narrative. Although the woman is rendered in a very archaic commensurate with Parisian modernism, her bold and expressive face shies away from the viewer she confronts. The massive arms and hands of the female figure bear a close resemblance to those of Picasso's colossal women (figure 3.48). While not delicate, the facial features of the woman also remind one of the idealized figures from classical Greece in which the forehead and nose align to deny any natural defects. Here in Ahmed Parvez's *Eve* (figure 3.47) the facial features of the woman are abstracted in geometric. Ahmed Parvez probably found information on ancient Greece and Picasso in books at the British library in Lahore. Neither the subject nor the style of the painting carries any of the Indic traditions, and the painting is a drastic shift from Ahmed Parvez's previous style. By this time, the artist had completely given up his earlier training in western academic naturalism and has evolved his work by imitating western abstraction. It is difficult to trace any hybrid elements in this particular work, and one may think of its characteristics as mimicking the Parisian modernism, which according to Bhabha can serve as "a camouflage." The desire of the colonized to emerge as "authentic" through mimicry- a process of repetition, which is the final irony of partial representation of postcolonialism. This can be further analyzed according to Bhabha's definition of colonial mimicry according to which, "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed,

recognizable other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*

Mimicry is thus the sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizing power.”³⁶⁸

Bhabha theorizes that through ambivalence the authority of colonial discourse is disrupted. It is an unwelcome and unwanted aspect of colonial discourse because colonizers want to produce compliant subjects who “mimic” their habits and values. Instead colonization produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never very far from mockery. *Eve after the Fall* represents Ahmed Parvez’s desire to be on equal footing with the colonizer, which strengthens the notion of ambivalence, disrupting the authority of colonial discourse.

The female figure is bold compared to works by other LAC artists, who maintained the delicacy of the feminine beauty in their adopted abstraction. The overall treatment of the painting relies on the angular use of black outlines (a reference to Indic artistic tradition) that Ahmed Parvez previously used in his *Still Life* (figure 3.18) and *Houses* (figure 3.30). The background details of the painting—a cloud in the sky, the mountains separated by what may be a triangular waterfall—are rendered in a most abstract and schematic way.

Summary

The wide range of figurative renderings by LAC artists bespeaks an array of styles within the group, demonstrating that although many shared popular ideas, each

³⁶⁸ Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 126.

artist developed his individual modern syntax. These men borrowed elements from western modern art; however, their goal was not to transplant these prototypes, albeit in a local context, but to synthesize the local and international. LAC members wanted to invent a modern language with which they could associate themselves while contributing to an international art scene.

Acknowledging Shakir as both a contributor and mentor to LAC, Akbar Naqvi has called the group *Shakir Ali and his Panj Pyare*, which translates as “Shakir Ali and his five beloveds.”³⁶⁹ He states, “In his [Shakir’s] circle there were neither masters nor pupils, though one was more equal than the others.”³⁷⁰ The analysis of artworks provided above testifies to the variety of individual styles within LAC, which was fueled by the members’ enthusiasm for exploring new stylistic paths. The evolution of LAC artists should be understood as a process in which the flow of inspiration came from both eastern and western art. Their borrowed inspiration from a number of art movements does not diminish the artistic evolution of these modernist artists, who intended to place their work on an international footing.

As Partha Mitter keenly observes, western artists have taken inspiration from non-western cultures and reinterpreted them as “Modern,” but work by eastern artists who use the same strategy (seeking inspiration from the West) is automatically categorized as derivative. This double standard needs to be challenged with more research to further the discourse of modern art produced in non-western cultures in order to make the canon of

³⁶⁹ Naqvi borrowed the Panjabi term *Panj Piyare* from Sikh ruler of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who called his five advisers his *Panj Pyare*, meaning his “five loved ones,” but he clarifies that no other connotations should be drawn from it. Naqvi, *Image and Identity*, 261.

³⁷⁰ Naqvi. *Image and Identity*, 270.

art history more inclusive. Keeping in mind the events and circumstances that surrounded the first decade of Pakistan's establishment, it must be noted that LAC's struggle to produce an art compatible with the international work was a phenomenal effort. LAC artists could have easily continued to paint traditional works of art on a par with Chughtai's Mughal-Persian painting style or Haji Sharif's Indian miniature painting, which might have been more readily accepted by the international art scene as Pakistani art. Instead, LAC members challenged themselves to participate and engage ideology.

Chapter 4
**From Lahore Art Circle to Pakistan Art Group, London: An End and A New
Beginning**

Thus far this dissertation has explored LAC's evolution and continuous quest for a new type of international Pakistani modernism. LAC artists' experience with the prevalent art practices in pre-independence British India frames this discourse. Their inquisitive investigation and keenness to learn became critical LAC hallmarks whose members strove to become part of the international modern artistic conversation, while consciously subverting the nationalist mandate for an Islamist state and thus the concomitant of religious rather than secular art. Though five of the six LAC artists had no direct experience with prevailing western trends, their knowledge was gained secondarily through Shakir Ali and books from the British Library in Lahore. Specifically, Shakir Ali's dynamic mentorship extended their knowledge and exposure to the modern western world, creating an important foundation on which the artists could independently generate the discourse of Pakistani modern art. None of them had a chance to travel to the West until 1955 when some of them gradually started to shift their attention to living and working Europe.

The objective of this dissertation has been to investigate LAC and its members' work created between 1952 and 1957. Examination of their painting has included

contextualizing the formulation of modern art in a new Islamic nation and acknowledging LAC's contributions to Pakistan as a modern nation with international affiliations through their painterly conversations with European modernism and certain pre- and post-Partition customs and traditions.

Rather than replicating European iterations of modernism, LAC artists invented a unique idiom of modernism that was a hybrid of the eastern and western aesthetics. Chapter 3 has provided analysis of many of the works of LAC artists that obviously bespeak the element of hybridity, which is prominent sometimes in style, subject or use of color. However, sometimes the works of LAC may have appear to mimic certain western movement such as in Ahmed Parvez's work *Eve*, (figure 3.47), in which it is difficult to trace hybridity. Works like this creates doubt and exhibits ambivalent relationship of the colonized with the colonizer, which according to Bhabha's view, "... is ambivalent because the colonized is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. Rather than assuming that some colonized subjects are "complicit" and some "resistant," ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating manner within the colonial subject." For this reason, the applicability of the framework of postcolonial studies provides its useful concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry to understand these works of art.

Though LAC members struggled to promote their work internationally, within Pakistan they created a distinctively secular trend in their art, without falling into the traps of traditional, national, and Islamic ideologies. One of LAC's corollary contributions was the establishment of modern art in the fields of art education and

design, as well as introducing new attitudes toward exhibition and gallery spaces for the new generation of younger Pakistani artists. In the years after LAC's break up, particularly after the late-1960s, these auxiliary benefits would have long-term effects on future generations of modern and contemporary artists in Pakistan. This final chapter sheds light on the legacy of LAC's formative years as its members continued their quest for a unique idiom of modernism with the formation of the new group in 1958, called Pakistan Group London: Five Modern Artists. Part of the goal of this chapter is to situate LAC's direct engagement with international modernism.

4.1 Lahore Art Circle to Pakistan Group London

Art movements outside of Lahore provide a context to understand the general reception towards modern art in Pakistan. For instance, common public, as well as art critics, gave Zubeida Agha's 1949 landmark exhibition of modern art in Karachi mostly harsh reviews (figure 1.17).³⁷¹ Considering the exhibition was held only two years after liberation from colonial status, it was too soon for Pakistan to accept art that appeared to emulate the West and divert from the strict Indic visual art traditions (e.g., Indian miniature painting, Bengal School and Chughtai's Mughal-Persian in addition to even western academic naturalism). The abstract idiom of the modern art was unfamiliar to the Pakistani public and was without a doubt viewed as a western transplant and, hence, incomprehensible. Zubeida's modernist paintings must have been perceived as rebellious

³⁷¹ Mussarat Hasan, a painter and writer states; "...very few people favored and some came back to her [Zubeida] in order to understand her point of view in her paintings." However, Hasan does not mention the name of the people who supported Zubeida's abstract work. See, Mussarat Hasan. *Zubeida Agha: A pioneer of Modern Art in Pakistan*, 20-21.

and, therefore, unwelcome. Yet she undeniably broke barriers and was the first artist to initiate a dialogue between western modern art and Pakistan. The lack of both art institutions and exhibitions of western art to introduce modern art in Pakistan did not help cultivate a taste for Zubeida's work (figure 1.17).

In 1950, upon receiving a scholarship at St. Martin's School of Art, London, Zubeida left Pakistan and for the next three years studied in England and Paris. She joined the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris, in 1951 and stayed in the city for the next two years. She returned to Pakistan in 1953 and settled in Karachi. In the meantime, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Shakir Ali returned to Karachi from the Czech Republic in 1951 and then moved to Lahore in 1952, a significant year in the history of Pakistani art. Shakir and his fellow LAC artists at that time began to create works of art that challenged the traditional perception of the Pakistani nation and, thereby, took art in Pakistan in an unprecedented direction.

Through the persistent practice and continuous refinement of their modern syntax (which allowed for freedom of expression without any binding rules of the prevalent eastern traditional practices or western academic painting), LAC artists fostered modern art in the formative years Pakistan's establishment. This transformation was accomplished, despite a limited number of exhibition venues and no government support. At this time, Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1899-1975) became the face of nationalist art in Pakistan, and the government wholeheartedly propagated the image of Islamic Pakistan with Chughtai's Mughal-Persian Islamic style of painting, seen in his paintings *Jahan Ara and Taj* (figure 1.9) and *Heeraman Tota* (figure 3.7). Although Chughtai's

connections and stylistic roots were rooted in the pre-Partition Bengal School, his rejection of western academic style and his acceptance of Islamic identity ironically provided the ideal conditions in which to establish a modern nationalist Islamic art in the new nation of Pakistan, as discussed in previous analysis of *College Girls* (figure 1.11) and *Hostel Girls* (figure 1.12). For this reason, most government projects in Lahore related to design and painting were given to Chughtai, including designing the monogram of Pakistan National Television (figure 4.1), Radio Pakistan (figure 4.2) and many postage stamps (figure 4.3) between 1948 and the 1960s.

In Karachi, Hassan Askari (1907- 1968) and Fyzee Rahamin (1886-1964) similarly received painting commissions for all official government portraits of the dignitaries and were considered state artists. In contrast, as a self-proclaimed 'avant-garde' group, LAC modern artists were at the periphery of the state-established agenda; however, in spite of their progressive activities, they were able to circumvent and subvert the nationalist agenda of the Islamic state. Besides making art, in public sphere these artists established their professional careers, working as graphic designers at private advertising agencies and publishing houses, in addition to teaching in art institutions and public schools in Lahore. These jobs provided enormous respectability, enabling them to promote effectively their great passion for modern art in Pakistan, despite its indifference from the state's Islamic mandate.

4.2 Locating Art Education in Pakistan

Unlike Zubeida Agha, who did not mingle with fellow artists, perhaps because of traditional ideas about women, the all-male LAC members did not make art in isolation; their close ties enabled them to keep abreast of each other's activities, so that ultimately the sum of their actions became much greater than their individual actions might have been. Besides familiarizing the new nation-state with modern art trends, LAC members also made important contributions to the dissemination of modern art education in Pakistan. Their activities continue to play an important role in Pakistan's view of contemporary art, due in large part to the lasting legacy of their efforts to teach students about modern art. With the exception of Sheikh Safdar Ali, LAC members taught art in schools and colleges. Shakir was an instructor of painting and drawing at the National College of Arts Lahore from 1952 to 1974; Moyene Najmi taught at Aitchison School Lahore, a prominent school for elites established in colonial India³⁷² from 1952-1985; Syed Ali Imam was an art teacher at the Sadiq Public School Bahawalpur and Lawrence College for Boys Ghora Gali,³⁷³ Murree from 1952-1955; and Anwar Jalal Shemza also was an art instruction at this Lawrence College for Boys as well as the Cathedral

³⁷² Sir Charles Umpherston Aitchison, the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, founded the school in 1886. To this day, it is considered the most prestigious college in India, educating boys, K-12, relying on the high standards of British education. It is the perfect type of institute to train a class of "Brown Sahib," that T. B Macaulay described as Indian in color and blood, but English in Taste. Aitchison to this day has the history of teaching mostly the children of elites who, in turn, will take over the reign of politics and aristocracy in Pakistan.

³⁷³ One of the photographs (figure 4.13) shows Ali Imam teaching drawing in a class at Sadiq Public School and his paintings in displayed in the background can be seen in the photographs. Lawrence College for Boys, Ghora Gali, Murree was a boarding school for children of elites and aristocrats. Ali Imam taught there during his low-days of hiding from the government because of being part of the communist party.

School,³⁷⁴ Lahore between 1953-1954. Although Ahmed Parvez like other LAC artists did not teach art on a regular basis, he delivered three lectures at the University of Punjab Lahore on the occasion of his as a solo show in 1952.³⁷⁵

The most significant contribution that Moyene Najmi made—along with his good friends Anwar Jalal Shemza, Sheikh Safdar Ali, and Shakir Ali—was to organize the first All Pakistan Children’s Art Exhibition in 1956. Details of this exhibition are provided in Chapter 3.³⁷⁶ The All Pakistan Children’s Art Exhibition was one of the first exhibitions highlighting the importance of art education in schools.

Asad Noon, one of Moyene Najmi’s students at Aitchison College Lahore, praised this instruction for never dictating how his students should draw. Instead, he would talk about the use of variety in line and color and encourage his students to establish harmony between the elements of design in a composition.³⁷⁷ Moyene Najmi’s pedagogy is indicative of LAC members’ progressive approach to modern art and the consequent openness in their approach not only to each others work but also to their students. This practice was unlike that of Allah Bux and Haji Sharif, who were teaching traditional academic and miniature painting styles to their students at NCA and who

³⁷⁴ Anwar Jalal Shemza became head of art department at Lawrence College for Boys Ghora Gali, Murree for a very short time, but again Lahore was the happenings place, so he couldn’t stay in Murree for long. In Lahore, he started teaching drawing in Cathedral High School run by Christian missionaries in Lahore.

³⁷⁵ Molka, Exhibition Catalog, 1953.

³⁷⁶ See appendix 4 for detail foreword by Moyene Najmi. It is important to note that the child who won the “Abdur Rahman Chughtai Gold Medal” in this exhibition was Kamil Khan Mumtaz, is a renowned architect of Pakistan. It is worth mentioning here that it is the same Kamil Khan, who showed his work as a student alongside Ahmed Parvez, Syed Ali Imam and Iqbal Geoffrey in an exhibition held at Oxford Bear Gallery, London in 1961.

³⁷⁷ Author interviewed Asad Noon in Lahore, Summer, 2014.

encouraged them to copy paintings by historically significant masters that they considered a foundational part of the artist's training.

While teaching at the National College of Arts, Lahore (previously Mayo School of Art) for twenty-two years from 1952-74, Shakir Ali supported the curriculum inspired by Bauhaus.³⁷⁸ He joined the school as a lecturer in the art department when it was Mayo School of Arts and Crafts; in 1958 when it was elevated to an art college, Shakir Ali became the first Pakistani principal. He inspired a number of his students, including Zahoor ul Akhlaq, one of Pakistan's most renowned artists, whose work is discussed later in this chapter. Both his contributions in particular and LAC's, in general, emphasized the critical need of art as an integral aspect of any culture and developing society.

4.3 New Beginnings after LAC: Post 1958 - Pakistan Group London

This section discusses the progress of LAC artists after its dispersal in 1958 and describes the directions their work took after their successful launch of modernist language in the art of Pakistan.

Shakir Ali:

From 1952 to 1954, Shakir Ali continued to live and teach at the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, one of the country's most prestigious art schools, which had initially been established as a school of art and craft in colonial India in 1875. In 1962, he became the principal of the NCA.³⁷⁹ Shakir's new administrative responsibilities made

³⁷⁸ Tarar, *Aesthetic Modernism in the Post-Colony*, 336.

³⁷⁹ Background information is provided in Chapter 2.

inroads into his time for creating art and although his productions slowed down for a time, he continued to paint. His work after 1958 became more abstract and spare from his earlier experimentation (See *White Vase* figure 3.13, *Reclining Nude* figure 3.33, *Standing Nude* figure 3.34 and *Man with the Cage* figure 3.40). In the 1960s, he started to focus purely on the issues of two-dimensional space on the surface of canvas. His *Untitled* (figure 4.4) indicates how his work started to engage with far more reductive compositions of mostly isolated figures.³⁸⁰ A thick black horizontal line is placed behind the head of this figure is highly ambiguous as is the woman herself whose features may have been inspired by Paleolithic or Neolithic art, making her appearance a testament to continuity and an underlying unity at the base of the human condition.

A major stylistic trend in Pakistan during its early years was the calligraphic abstraction, which became in the late 1960s a calligraphic painting movement rose. This genre suitably combined the modern approach with the country's Islamic agenda. Shakir readily adapted his work to this trend and returned to his early training in mural painting as he took a completely new modern approach to abstract art by exploring the generic form of Arabic calligraphy of the Quran in a pure, painterly expression (figure 4.5).³⁸¹ Shakir found Arabic letters incredibly fascinating to explore in terms of painting. Later, he also used Urdu poetry of Mirza Asad Ullah Ghalib (1797-1869), the most renowned

³⁸⁰ These works are in the collection of Faqir Ijjazuddin, in Lahore.

³⁸¹ Since Arabic calligraphy developed at different locations and periods, therefore, here are number of different kinds of Arabic scripts such as *Kufic*, *Nastaleeq*, *Mashriqi* and *Maghrabi* to name a few. In addition too each one of these kind there are several sub-shoots of these kinds depending on the geography and time period. In the case of Shakir Ali, it is not known which kind he was interested but in his work his use at large was the generic script of *Nastaleeq* easily readable, used in an everyday life of Pakistan.

Urdu poet of the Indian subcontinent, as a means for hybridizing calligraphic forms with painterly abstraction. Shakir painted several commissioned murals, including one on display at the Punjab Public Library, Lahore and another one at the Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan. In late 1977, Chief of the Army Staff, General Zia-ul-Haq with the support of joint Chief Admiral Muhammad Shariff, oversaw the successful coup against the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He dissolved the Parliament and Provincial Assembly of Pakistan and implemented Martial Law and the enforcement of Islamic national identity. Zia-Ul-Haq became the sixth President of Pakistan from 1978-1988. His presidential tenure is considered a black history of Pakistan as he implemented strict Islamic laws and promoted Islam forcefully. Artists were forced to work in the forms of calligraphy and figurative paintings were prohibited by the state at that time. As a result of this strict Islamic phase in Pakistan, Shakir Ali's work was posthumously celebrated as distinctively Islamic.

Sheikh Safdar Ali

Sheikh Safdar Ali continued to expand his advertising business and prolifically painted and exhibited his work in Pakistan and abroad. Safdar's earlier work, which depicted the merger of the grid and figures, fully matured into a signature style synthesizing more complex forms, as seen in *Untitled* (figure 4.6). The dark, rich palette of reds forms the background of the painting, which is then juxtaposed with several grid layers on top of it, resulting in an ambiguous and complex visual impression. The grids are centralized, keeping the edges of the painting carefully clear. The crescent-shaped

forms with various sized circles, squares, and rectangles gives an immediate impression of a procession of sailing ships, but could also be read as a night-time cityscape with high-rises and bright lights. The ambiguity of the image makes it intriguing and mysterious. The tedious work in overlaying layers of the black-and-white grid to expose certain colors and hide others also resonates with Safdar's earlier abstract landscape *Untitled* (figure 3.21), discussed in Chapter 4. In the later work, however, the complexity continues. Safdar's use of the grid became a precursor for many later Pakistani artists like Zahoor Ul Akhlaq (1941-1999), Rashid Rana (b. 1968), Ali Raza (b.1969), Ali Talpur (b. 1976) and among others.³⁸² Safdar's use of the grid in his work is very different from that of Piet Mondrian. In his early work, Safdar probably employed the grid much more like Mondrian, i.e., to simplify nature to its bare essentials, In his later work, however, Safdar' became much more interested in exploring and employing the grid as a constructive and additive element. Rather than a means of simplification and subtraction, it enhanced the complexity of his work.

Moyene Najmi

In 1959, Moyene Najmi joined the Pakistan Arts Council as its program executive, and he founded HUT, a community program for the public under the supervision of Faiz Ahmed Faiz. HUT offered art classes in drawing and painting to children and adults, and Moyene Najmi, Anna Molka, and other artists taught its classes. In 1961, Moyene Najmi was nominated for a UNESCO Fellowship for Art and

³⁸² Just like Safdar, Anwar Jalal Shemza also extensively used grid in his earlier works as well as in his later works produced in England.

Museography. Under the terms of this fellowship, Moyene Najmi visited galleries, museums, and art institutions in the United Kingdom, Germany, Holland, France, Italy, and Spain. On his return to Pakistan in 1962, he made substantial changes to his work, moving from the figurative (*Anarkali*, figure 3.55) and isolated landscapes (*Neela Gumbdh*, figure 3.26) to completely fragmented abstract architectural spaces such as *Moon and the Mosque* (Figure 4.7).

The painting depicts scattered abstract shapes on the canvas. The texture created with oil paints on a masonite surface is incredibly rich and reminiscent of Moyene Najmi's early work *Anarkali* (figure 3.55). The fragmented shapes appear to be pieces of architecture. Indeed, only the title indicates the presence of the moon and the mosque in the painting, otherwise, the shape of the moon is distorted beyond recognition. The structure that appears to be a mosque looks more like a mausoleum. The geometrical, angular shapes in combination with the textured surfaces give an impression of a relief collagraph print rather than a painting.³⁸³ The abstraction and fragmentation of architectural spaces constitute Moyene Najmi's new painting language. In 1973, while teaching and occasionally painting, Moyene Najmi converted a portion of his residence to the art gallery he established and named "Art Galleries: Fine Art Equity" in Lahore. He

³⁸³ Collagraph plate is used in relief printmaking. It is made with hard board on which an image is developed by pasting various textured shapes before the surface is coated with shellac (varnish) to make it water proof. After drying, it is run through a press and then oil-based inks are applied and wiped off. The recessed areas of the plate and any textured surfaces retain the ink while the flat surfaces are wiped cleaned. A damp paper over the plate is run through a hand press, which transfers the impression onto the paper.

offered the gallery space to artists as a place to showcase their works and invited individuals not only from Lahore but also from Karachi to exhibit their works.³⁸⁴

While the artists discussed thus far remained in Lahore, other members of the LAC between the years 1955 and 1956 moved to England.

London 1958: Pakistan Group London

Both Shakir Ali and Anna Molka Ahmed encouraged the young artists to widen their experience of art and life by traveling abroad.³⁸⁵ Three of LAC members, including Syed Ali Imam, Ahmed Parvez, and Anwar Jalal Shemza, left one by one for Europe and, gradually, the LAC started to disperse. By the end of 1958, the group had completely dissolved and its last meeting was held on October 20, 1958.³⁸⁶

After World War II, a number of artists from the newly independent British colonies traveled to England to study in a range of academic fields. Others moved there because they were frustrated by the lack of criticality and internationalism in their art institutions at home; many artists decided to make London their home because they were seduced by the spreading language of modernism and wanted to live in one of the places they viewed as a center for the new ideas associated with it.³⁸⁷ Artists such as Avinash Chandra (1931-1991) and F.N. Souza from India, as well as Iqbal Geoffrey (b. 1941),

³⁸⁴ Moyene Najmi generally collaborate with Ali Imam in exhibiting works of Karachi based artists in Lahore.

³⁸⁵ Husain. *Ahmed Parvez*, 6.

³⁸⁶ It was scheduled in the meeting of Sep17th, 1958. See Appendix 1, for the meeting minutes of Sep1958.

³⁸⁷ Leyla Fakhr. "Artist in Pursuit of an International Language," 70-72

Syed Ali Imam, Ahmed Parvez, and Anwar Jalal Shemza from Pakistan migrated to London between 1949 and 1958. These artists, from both India and Pakistan, had been well established in their home countries, making it even more difficult for them to break into the western art scene because their colonial-era identities followed them there.

In 1958, three LAC painters, together with two additional artists from East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh)—Safiuddin Ahmed (1922-2012) and Murtaza Bashir (b. 1930)—founded a second art circle in London that they called the Pakistan Group London: Five Modern Painters. They held their first group shown at the Woodstock Gallery in 1958. The general secretary of the group was Saleem Shahid³⁸⁸ who had been the first general secretary of LAC. The brochure for the exhibition outlined their aims as follows: “To project Pakistani art and to introduce contemporary Pakistani artists. To create and provide opportunities and facilities for contemporary and young Pakistani artists to exhibit their work abroad.”³⁸⁹

Ahmed Parvez

In 1955, the first LAC member to leave for London was Ahmed Parvez, who was despondent after having been refused a scholarship from the Ecole des Beaux in Paris.³⁹⁰ After arriving in London, he took up several odd jobs to make a living. He worked at the High Commission of Pakistan as a clerk and continued to paint and find venues to exhibit

³⁸⁸ Saleem Sahhid use to conduct Urdu programs for BBC London.

³⁸⁹ “Pakistan Group London: Five Modern Artists,” *Catalogue*, 1958.

³⁹⁰ He vowed never to show his work in Paris—a promise that he kept for his life. Husain, *Ahmed Parvez*, 12.

his work. Meanwhile, he connected with his two comrades from Lahore, Syed Ali Imam, and Anwar Jalal Shemza.

In 1961, after many hardships, Ahmed Parvez was able to participate in a group show in Oxford. After this exhibition, he participated in several group and solo shows. Mariam Habib, a colleague during his days as an LAC members, recalls that his work in London was small-scale, representing a “miniature phase” in which he employed watercolor and relied on sharp outlines. According to the artist himself, “he was inspired by the tiny brilliance of the classical Moghul school of miniature.”³⁹¹

Ahmed Parvez’s *Untitled* (figure 4.8), from the early 1960s, indicates his shift from the earlier figurative *Eve* (figure 3.47) toward abstraction. In *Untitled* (figure 4.8), a large vigorously painted flower is centralized in the painting. The dynamic brush strokes bespeak energetic gestural movements. Rather than a mimetic representation of the flower, the artist has opted for a somewhat abstract expression with a childlike naïveté to it. On the left side of the painting, there is a small dark gray bird in motion that is trailed by dark green and black marks, which give the impression of the bird fluttering away in space and time. The painting seems to present a frozen moment of a bird in motion that has been captured in an expressive manner. The abstracted flower appears to be so highly energetic that another bird that is drawn to it. For Parvez medium was not of great importance, and he would utilize what was at hand, including watercolors, oil pastels, oil paints and even color chalk. He would paint on canvas, thick paper and even on the

³⁹¹ Mariam Habib. “The Colours of Vibrant Brilliance,” *Pakistan Times*, October 19, 1979.

previous day's newspaper. He believed in the need to paint spontaneously and refrain from becoming stuck in formalities.

Ahmed Parvez's life was difficult, and his anxiety was relentless, never allowing him to settle anywhere for very long. He lived in London for ten years from 1955 to 1964, married his childhood friend Rani, and fathered four children, but one day he quietly left London and returned to Pakistan and settled in Karachi. In 1966, he remarried, this time, a Japanese-born American woman Reiko Isago in Karachi and left with her for America. In 1968, while living in New York, he had a solo show at Gallery International, Manhattan. He lived in New York until 1969 and during this time he had a son with Reiko. He later left his second family and settled again in Karachi for the remainder of his life. In Karachi, he continued to paint and live a bohemian life. He was successful financially because of the flourishing sale of his art, but because of problems with alcohol addiction he ended up selling his works on the street in exchange for cigarettes or wine. In 1978, he was bestowed with the President's Pride of Performance award. He died due to a brain hemorrhage in 1979 in Karachi.

Syed Ali Imam

Ali Imam left for London in 1956 and had a challenging life there, similar to what he had experienced when he migrated to Pakistan from India in 1947. He joined St. Martin's School of Arts as an evening student. During the day, he held such odd jobs as operating an elevator in a high-rise building and working for an advertising company. During this time, he avidly read art history and such writers as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-

1980) and became interested in western classical music.³⁹² In the evenings, he painted.

When he and his four other artist friends formed the Pakistan Group London, Ali Imam

noted:

The first Group of painters in the country, so to speak, all benefited by going abroad. They collected the latest information on modern art trends and techniques, were well versed in the history of art and important schools of painting. They also studied painters, their work and the significance of their various places in the history of modern art movements. It was a different life altogether, friends met and shared what they had, material things were far less important in those days.³⁹³

Like all the other LAC members, Ali Imam's work also changed when he moved to London. During his early years in England, Ali Imam moved in the direction of the figurative painting. In *Two Women* (figure 4.9), the facing figures are painted in semi-abstract manner and appear to represent traditional women from Pakistan due to the scarves wrapped around their heads and bodies, even though their features resemble classic Greek prototypes. The figures are painted with blunt, angular lines, endowing the forms with a knowing naïveté and modern simplicity. Thick paint has been applied in several semi-transparent layers so that the color underneath is in evidence. The warm Indian red and yellow colors in the background form a halo-like cutout behind the two ladies. The features of both the women are far from idealistic or naturalistic. One wonders what compelled Ali Imam to present such an image of women with Muslim identity with head coverings so specific to Pakistan (previously north India) while he is living in London. Is it because he is in a new country trying to establish his identity as a

³⁹² Husain, *Ali Imam*, 40. He taught himself to understand and appreciate western classical music. He listened to works by Beethoven, Bach and Mozart. He would attend concerts at the Royal Festival Hall and at the Albert Hall and learned to appreciate conductors such as Toscanini, Sir Malcolm Sargent and Sir Barbarolli.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

Pakistani artist? British art critic R. M. Douglas cited Ali Imam in a review of his art: “I am very proud to be a Pakistani,” he says but adds that he only intends to return to his home country when he has asserted himself as an artist in London—a Pakistani artist.³⁹⁴

Ali Imam returned to Karachi in 1967 and assumed a teaching position at the Karachi Arts Council. Later, in 1971, he opened Indus Gallery in the lower portion of his residence, and this enterprise had a profound effect on Karachi’s art scene. Indus Gallery became a hub for art activities in the city. Besides regular art exhibitions, lectures on art, and art discussions, Indus gallery also hosted enjoyable gatherings every Sunday morning. It was a destination for any visitor from within or outside the country. Ali Imam was central to establishing connections between local, regional, national, and even international connections in the art world. Introducing the artists and their work to dignitaries, to common people and to art students was a duty that Ali Imam willingly imposed on himself. A small section of the Indus gallery also housed Ali Imam’s antique collections from around the world, which can be seen in the photograph (figure 4.14).

According to Mrs. Shehnaz Ali Imam:

Ali Imam was very devoted to educating students who besides coming to Karachi Art Council for painting lessons, would gather at his home in the evenings and weekends to hear his lectures on the art history.³⁹⁵

Anwar Jalal Shemza

³⁹⁴ R. M. Douglas. “Pakistani Artist in London,” *Contemporary Art in Pakistan* 1: (1960), 7.

³⁹⁵ At least two of Ali Imam’s lectures on world art history have been retrieved. The lectures were no doubt prepared for his students. Mrs. Shehnaz Imam also shared the information that besides art history lectures, Ali Imam also advised students on ways to improve their English writing skills and encouraged them to take classes in Urdu. Aauthor’s interview Shehnaz Imam at her residence in March 2015, Karachi.

Of the three LAC members to move to England, Anwar Jalal was the only one to secure a British Council Scholarship to study art at the Slade School of Arts London. When he moved to London in 1956, he faced many challenges, including the one that really disturbed his creative abilities: his realization that no one in London knew Shemza as an artist although he was famous in Pakistan.³⁹⁶ In addition, the British art education at the Slade School and the cultural shock of finding himself in a totally different world immensely depressed him. In Slade, Professor Ernest Gombrich lecture on Islamic Art, in which he asserted that so-called “Islamic art is only functional,” raised several critical questions in Shemza’s mind. In his own word:

One evening, when I was attending a Slade weekly lecture on the history of art, Prof. Gombrich came to the chapter on Islamic Art – an art which was ‘functional’ – from his book, ‘The Story of Art’. I remember leaving the room a few minutes before the lecture finished, and sitting on a bench outside. As the students came out, I looked at all their faces; they seemed so contented and self-satisfied. I went home and looked again in the mirror. This time, I couldn’t find any familiar face at all, neither the beginner at the Slade, nor the ‘celebrated artist’. I couldn’t talk; I just stared. After all, it wasn’t a very pleasant sight. All evening I destroyed paintings, drawings, everything that could be called ‘art’. All night I argued with somebody – as I was told next morning by my hostel neighbour . . . No longer was the answer simply to begin again; the search was for my own identity. Who was I? The simple answer was: A Pakistani. But this wasn’t enough.³⁹⁷

He started to question his previous art practice and his identity. In the midst of trying to resolve his identity while assimilating aspects of a western perception of the East (especially Islamic art), Shemza discovered a new direction for his art. He moved from figurative work and the use of grids. Instead, the abstraction of English and Urdu

³⁹⁶ Iftikhar Dadi quotes Shemza in his catalogue article, “Anwar Jalal Shemza: Calligraphic Abstraction Shemza and Calligraphic Abstraction,”3.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 3.

alphabets became a new direction for his work (figure 4.10). Besides painting, he also started to explore other mediums such as printmaking, collage, and ceramics. Shemza recognized the need to educate himself before returning to Pakistan when he would then share his new knowledge. He communicated his desire to return to Pakistan and teach in a letter to his close friend the writer Karam Nawaz, who was in Pakistan. He wrote:

Whatever I have obtained in this country (England), it was solely for the sake of students in my country. I have tirelessly struggled to master the intricacies of artistic technique—these researches for people of my nation who are anxious to benefit from Western experiments. But will I be bale to convey this trust to them, I wonder? This is an extremely painful question, for which I see no clear answer.³⁹⁸

While completing his studies at Slade, Shemza married the British painter Mary Katrina, and started a family. During this time, he made steady progress in establishing a place for himself as an artist living and working in London and exhibited his work at various galleries. In 1960, Shemza, together with his wife and daughter, Tasveer, returned to Lahore in hopes of finding a teaching position. In 1961, after not obtaining a suitable teaching position in Lahore, a disheartened Shemza returned to London for good, settled in Stafford, and took up a teaching position at a local high school. For the rest of his life, he focused on his work and teaching. The works Shemza painted in London received glowing reviews from art critics in the West and his work was considered compatible with the “high standards of western painting.” In 1961, the London-based critic G. M. Butcher wrote a review of Shemza’s work for *Contemporary Arts in Pakistan: Quarterly Magazine*. Butcher highly praised Shemza’s works that he had

³⁹⁸ Dadi. *Anwar Jalal Shemza*, 3.

painted in London after graduating from Slade and at a time when he had denounced his earlier work made in Pakistan as only imitative of western painting. In Butcher's words:

His [Shemza] own work before he traveled to England was itself exactly the kind of imitative Western painting which seems to me so deplorable—a mish mash of semi realist, semi-cubist styling of 'Indian' themes. Fortunately, Shemza was perspicacious enough soon to see how unsatisfactory this was. And the very much higher quality qualitative standards of Western painting reacted upon him in such a way that it gave him courage to express his own origins—the one thing he “had in his bones” to express qualitatively on a level with the work he found going on around him.³⁹⁹

Butcher's statement is representative of how the western art critics dismissed Shemza's earlier work, considering it to be merely derivative until the artist had first-hand exposure to western art and training. This piece of criticism, which is characteristic of other responses to Shemza's painting, shows that without a stamp of approval from the West, artists from a non-western culture at the time needed western critical approval in order to be considered a serious artist.

The art critic Andrew Forge makes a similar type of patronizing compliment of Shemza's work in his catalog essay in which he reaffirms the West's hegemony and the post-colonial necessity to seek its approval:

Shemza has been intelligent enough to grasp European art at the point at which it was stretched nearest to the East: in the work of Paul Klee. He has made a special study of Klee and has been able to use this influence positively, applying his principles of growth and development to the sort of forms, which he knows intimately himself. His paintings derive equally from the rhythmical spaces, filling patterns of the rugs and from the growing line of modern Western art. His pictures are not mere patterns and images, and their forms, whether painted or drawn invest the surface with a mysterious life.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ G. M. Butcher. "Shemza: Years in London," *Contemporary Arts in Pakistan: A Quarterly Magazine*, 11: 2, (1961), 11.

⁴⁰⁰ Andrew Forge. "Catalogue Essay," New Vision Gallery, 1959.

Fish (figure 4.11) dated 1956 is one of the earliest works Shemza painted in London. The work is comprised of a number of vividly painted goldfish pictured against the type of gridded structures found in the artist's previous work in Pakistan such as *Still Life with Red Vase* (figure 3.16). The painting is as intriguing as it is challenging for a viewer to figure out the number of fishes painted. At first glance there appear to be three to five big fishes painted horizontally across the surface and two additional smaller fish vertically positioned on the left side of the canvas. This ambiguous and illusionistic piece by Shemza connects to his earlier works, the images of which were reproduced in black and white in his monograph, published in collaboration with his solo show at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, in 1956. In *Couple* (figure. 3.31) and *The Kiss* (figure 3.32), both painted in 1954, the two paintings depict images of two male-and-female couples interlocking lips in a way that it is hard to separate and distinguish each face from the other. Shemza subscribes to this same strategy of interlocking form in his series of fish paintings in which these creatures are paired and fused together, making them hard to separate one from the other. Such design elements as line, shape, and texture are dominate in these paintings, referencing his earlier practice as a designer as well his engagement with western abstraction.⁴⁰¹ No doubt Shemza's schooling at Slade enabled him to refine and enrich his mode of tightly scripted overlapping forms, but his previous practice of art cannot be simply disregarded because of lacking first-hand exposure to the West. This case seems similar to the dismissal in 1922 of the modern art produced by

⁴⁰¹ Like Sheikh Safdar and Moyene Najmi, Shemza also used to design book covers. Shemza created them for his own novels and for other writers including Karam Nawaz.

Gaganendranath Tagore's modern work by a British critic unable to accept the idea that a colonial living and working solely in India could be modern. Similarly, although Shemza's earlier hybrid work produced in Pakistan shows his serious engagement with modern trends of the West, it was still marginalized. This can be further seen in Bhabha's terms, "The colonizer, never really wants, however, the colonized to be an exact replica, as this would be too threatening to the colonizer's ultimate authority."⁴⁰²

4.4 LAC's Enduring Legacy: Contemporary Art of Pakistan

LAC's most lasting legacy to the modern art of Pakistan is Zahoor ul Akhlaq, the protégé of Shakir Ali at the National College of Arts Lahore and now the most renowned contemporary artist of Pakistan. Just like his mentor Shakir Ali, Zahoor changed the course of Pakistani modern art. Zahoor joined the National College of Arts Lahore in 1959. During his time there Shakir Ali helped to develop Zahoor's critical skills and introduced the young artist to English and Urdu classical literature in order to help him further his artistic education. Zahoor completed his four-year diploma in fine arts in 1962 and became just as innovative an artist as his mentor Shakir. His work represents a critical rethinking of traditional miniature painting. His new approach was both modern and traditional simultaneously, and it questioned such popular trends as copying the traditional miniature painting as is for the sake of revival of tradition.

Zahoor selected and utilized certain formal characteristics of Indian miniature painting in his work, such as the frame within the frame and multiple perspectives as seen

⁴⁰² Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 77.

in *Untitled* (figure 4.12). Grids and geometric shapes appeared in his work as a consistent theme, which was synonymous with the abstraction of the Pakistani modern and western geometric abstract artists. Some of the recurring images in Zahoor's work include clouds, female figures, hands, mountains and decorative motifs. Shakir's stated that "art should not tell stories," and Zahoor held similar views about his own painting practice. During one of his painting exhibitions in Karachi he stated,

[The] paintings on view were no more and no less than paintings. The paintings do not have to be understood; they are what they are, as they appear to the viewer. Nevertheless, his work often reflected on social injustices and political upheavals in Pakistani society.⁴⁰³

During his teaching career at National College of Arts, Zahoor ul Akhlaq in return had an enormous impact on the next generations of Pakistani artists, now renowned contemporary Pakistani artists whose work have been acknowledged by the international art world as among the most cutting-edge artists from around the world. This includes Rashid Rana (b.1968), Ali Raza (b.1969), Anwar Saeed (b. 1957), Shazia Sikander (b. 1969), Risham Syed (b. 1969) to name a few. In many ways, these artists can be considered the third generation of Shakir Ali's mentorship. A critical note on the distinctive practice of Pakistan is that most of these artists, besides producing art that is well received on the international art scene, are prominent art educators in Pakistan and continue to teach in the two institutions in Lahore: National College of Art and Beaconhouse National University Lahore. To be an artist of international caliber and to

⁴⁰³ Gregory Minissale. "Black is the Beginning," *The Herald* (1991), 151.

dedicate time to teaching is a distinct quality of Pakistani artists, which is used as a model to follow for many of the neighboring South Asian countries.

In short, Shakir and his fellow modern artists had a ripple effect on the modern and contemporary art of Pakistan. In a number of ways, through teaching, exhibiting their works and holding debates in personal and public gatherings, they changed the course of making and perceiving art in Pakistan. Their goal was to be part of the discourse of modernism internationally, instead of being content to constructing a regional modernism.

4.5 Conclusion

This dissertation's analysis of LAC and its members' works has focused on the progression and development of a hybrid nuanced and localized version of modernism, which is not merely a copy of a particular mode of European modernism. Instead, LAC invented an innovative visual idiom of modernism that was multifaceted, yet shaped by the unique socio-political conditions of the postcolonial nation. The double burden of rejecting the colonial past and yet, embracing the nostalgia of the glorious Islamic past of the Mughal period was at the core of the nationalist agenda of the newly formed Islamic state of Pakistan. LAC artists' hybrid works provide a distinctive case study of international modernism and negotiations of localized approaches toward adopting a distinctly modern art outside mainstream western modernism, yet nonetheless informed by some of its major objectives and developments. Their works, although produced during the most volatile period of Pakistani history, did not conform to these nationalistic

or Islamic agenda of the newly established country. Their works can be considered as reflecting a hybrid identity of bridging secular and modern worlds. In fact the diversity in each member's work signifies the fact that there was not a single approach that could have become the foundation for the group. In retrospect, it appears that they actually teamed up to preclude one foundation, so they were able to create works that would pose questions rather than answers to their practices.

Forging their new identity within this postcolonial context, LAC artists needed to compete with the modern world by adapting the visual language of its vanguard antecedents in the western art movements—at the time still considered the language of the colonizer. LAC members wanted to engage in this dialogue in order to position themselves alongside the West and the rest of the world. In the complex and ambivalent relationship of the once colonizers and the former colonized that the works produced by LAC members remain a hybrid, and sometimes appear to mimic the culture of their colonizer. For this reason, perhaps LAC works created during their formative years have been dismissed and considered unoriginal or simply derivative. To counter these assumptions, this study has framed the biography of LAC artists and their works within the frameworks of postcolonial studies through a consideration of the theories of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry. This firsthand study of the works of individual LAC artists in relation to each other and their critical responses to certain aspects of western modernism suggests that, instead of a reductive reading of LAC's work as poor copies of western art movements, this art needs to be analyzed with the same discretion, nuanced, and careful examination of sources, divergences, innovations, and

recontextualized readings that art historians have applied to the works of western artists, whose works were inspired by the non-western cultures and are regarded as innovative and modern rather than derivative.

The Lahore Art Circle and its namesake center, Lahore, a dynamic city of arts and culture, positioned Pakistan as a modern nation that has continued to make crucial contributions to the modern art internationally. LAC's critical engagement with modern art initiated the trajectory of Pakistani modern art, and the artists' deep commitment to their art is evident in their continuous, individual experimentation, and efforts to find an idiom of the modern—hence they never settled on one style over another and, continued to re-invent their own individual styles within the group. LAC members' introduction of modern approaches to art education and their emphasis on modern art itself have had a lasting impact on successive generations of artists.

This study concludes that while breaking away from traditional South Asian art practices and borrowing a generalized vocabulary from various modern western art movements, LAC artists continuously experimented and evolved their work by exploring a number of different genres and styles. For instance, Shakir, the leader of LAC, was familiar with cubist sensibilities because he took classes in Paris with the noted cubist André Lhote. However, Shakir did not adopt an conventional cubist style; instead, he embraced certain general cubist sensibilities such as painting objects two- dimensionally from multiple perspectives and then reinterpreted them by using local colors, motifs or subject matter so that they were grounded in a South Asian context. The representation of an object with multiple views can be attributed to cubism but at the same time, it can also

be associated with the multiple perspectives used in traditional Indian miniature painting. The thick application of paint is an approach not used in the East before, and it is derived from European impressionism. Following Shakir's trajectory of experimentation and his own individual nuances of modernism, his younger cohorts, who did not have first-hand contact with western modern movements, utilized an exploratory approach to adopt a range of vocabulary from western art movements, and the works that they subsequently created do not fall into a specific kind of western modern art movement; instead, they recalibrate a language of modernism to synthesize the aesthetics of the East and the West, hence offering a rich amalgamation of the two. Their approach was exploratory, and the modernism they invented was a heuristic modernism, which continuously evolved with experimentation and trial-and-error methods. Their continuous shifts and combining of various generalized sensibilities inspired by western modern art movements—Cubism, Post-impressionism, Abstraction, Surrealism, De Stijl—and the ancient art found in Ajanta cave paintings represented their concerted bid to be considered modern Pakistani painters.

In addition to considering the variable styles for each individual artist within LAC and not concretely establishing a single modernist movement might presume that there was no real basis for what LAC were trying to do as a group. This study proposes that instead of analyzing the works of LAC members in terms of a common style, a more objective and convincing way would be understand that the group was united in terms of the many questions they were empirically posing through their art, questions that precluded only one direction. Thus, their many interrogations of aspects of western

modernism, with a Pakistani view kept firmly in mind, bespeaks the richness of the experimental time and the excitement of creating an art capable of moving the young country of Pakistan in a truly modern and international direction.

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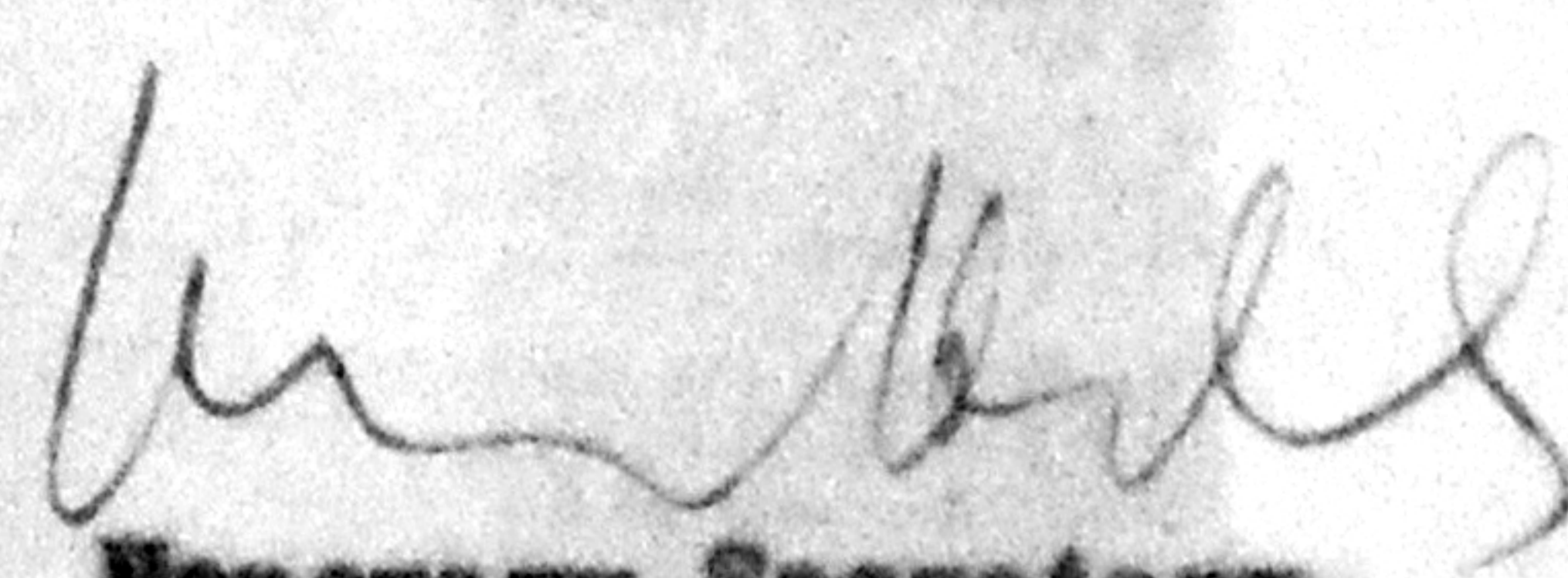
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MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE LAHORE ART CIRCLE HELD ON 17-9-1958
at 5.30 p.m. at 4 Lake Road.
.....

Present: Mrs. Hassan Habib.
Mr. Shakir Ali.
Mr. Meeyens Najmi.
Mr. Saffdar Ali.
Honorary Secretary, Lahore Art Circle.

- I. Mr. Shakir Ali informed that the American Friends of the Middle-East which now had an office in Karachi had obtained a good building and had reserved a gallery for the permanent sale and display of paintings by Pakistan Artists. The Association would glad to receive paintings from Artists for this purpose. There are no charges or commission except that the Artists should arrange for the transport of their paintings. Mr. Shakir Ali promised to send a copy of the letter received from the Association to the Honorary Secretary, Lahore Art Circle.
- II. The following programme for the coming Winter season was decided:-
- (a) Exhibition by the Lahore Art Circle in Alhambra - Nov. 5 (3rd or 4th week).
The members of the Lahore Art Circle will be the participating Artists. Each Artist will exhibit 8 paintings.
 - (b) The Lahore Art Circle will also send paintings by its member Artists for the National Art Exhibition at Karachi to be held some time in the end of Dec. 58. It is expected that the Pakistan Art Council Karachi will address organisations in Lahore for this purpose.
- III. The next meeting of the Lahore Art Circle will be held on 20th October, 1958 at 4 Lake Road at 5 p.m.


Honorary Secretary,
Lahore Art Circle, Lahore.

15/9

CONFIDENTIAL

PAKISTAN

November 17, 1953

The Country Plan

The USIS objectives in Pakistan are to convince Pakistan that Soviet-Chinese imperialism is a real and serious threat to Pakistan and neighboring countries, and to insure Pakistan's active alignment with the United States in the exercise of our leadership among the free nations of the world.

USIS priority targets are political leaders, government officials, students, military personnel, journalists and other mass media persons, professors and educational administrators, secondary school teachers and students, business executives and professionals.

USIS has been assigned the tasks of helping the people of Pakistan to realize that the independence and integrity of Pakistan and surrounding countries are threatened by Sino-Soviet Communist imperialism; that communist imperialism menaces Islam; that the communist economic system, which is based on slavery, does not offer material and spiritual advancement to the common man; that the communist offers of goods and markets to Asian nations are not made in good faith and that they are no alternative to trade with the Free World; USIS also has the tasks of stimulating confidence in the United States, its purposes, its capacities and its leadership for peace and security; stimulating belief that the United States is friendly to Pakistan and interested in the well-being of its people; stimulating the realization that the United States and Pakistan have important material interests and that they should increasingly collaborate for their achievement; stimulating confidence that the security of free nations, including Pakistan, is an active concern of the United States; stimulating the realization that economic progress in Pakistan is best achieved by the determined and energetic efforts by Pakistan's own leaders and people to improve their own condition through self-help, coupled with cooperation with the United States (e.g. through Point Four) and other free countries; stimulating the belief that the United States traditionally has been and is today sympathetic to the aspirations of colonial and other dependent people for self-determination; stimulating awareness of the spiritual elements common to Islam and the United States; stimulating the realization that the American way of life gives emphasis to achievement and participation in cultural activities; stimulating the realization that in the United States, because of its democratic system, increasing opportunities are available to minority groups; stimulating the belief that the people of the Middle East and South Asia on the one hand, and the American on the other, are equals; inducing as required the belief that the United States tries, in the context of global problems and responsibilities, to support just settlements of all international disputes (i.e. Kashmir, Iranian oil, Arab-Israel relations, ect.), and to stimulate an appreciation of the contribution of the United Nations to the economic, social, and educational development of Pakistan, and the important influence Pakistanian leaders exert in United Nations activities.

The Role of the

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The Role of the Information Center

During the past year the three Information Centers in Pakistan located at Karachi, Lahore and Dacca have carried on fairly well-rounded cultural programs. The latest semi-annual report from Pakistan states that the greatest development in USIS occurred in the cultural affairs field where the Cultural Officers and Librarians through the Information Centers brought a message about America to thousands of Pakistani. The Karachi program is by far the best not only because it has been in existence longer but also because both Lahore and Dacca have been hampered by inadequate space. Pakistan reports show considerable increases in attendance and book circulation for the Information Centers. In addition to regular library services, the programs of the three Centers include seminars, debates, lectures, exhibits and extension services to schools, colleges and a few public libraries. Lahore has done considerably more in extension services than either Karachi or Dacca. Registered borrowers and Center patrons, with the exception of juveniles, belong exclusively to the target groups.

Book Collections

The book collection of the Center at Karachi now totals approximately 10,000 volumes in English plus a small number of Urdu translations. In addition to the regular shipments of new books which will keep the collection current, the scientific and technical sections of the collection should be added to. This collection is now of such a size that it must be weeded regularly for it should not grow to more than 11,000 volumes.

The book collection of the Center at Lahore now totals approximately 6,200 volumes including a few Urdu translations. If adequate space were available, the collection should be increased to 8,000; however, this is impossible and therefore the regular flow of materials to keep the collection current is all that can be done.

The book collection of the Center at Dacca now totals approximately 4,500 volumes in English. Lack of space and the recent administrative difficulties have greatly hindered the growth of the collection. It should be increased in all fields to an approximate total of 8,000 volumes now that adequate space is available.

Of the approximate 75,000,000 population of Pakistan, slightly less than 10,500,000 are literate. This educated minority all falls within the primary USIS target groups of the country. A large part of these groups are literate in English, but to serve those who are not, additional materials in translation are needed in all of the centers.

It is recommended that a few hundred scientific and technical books be added to the Karachi collection, that the regular flow of new materials be supplied to all three centers, that the Dacca collection be increased to approximately 8,000 volumes as soon as possible and that additional translations be added to all three collections.

Administration

Administration

1) Personnel

The Information Centers at Karachi, Lahore and Dacca were opened in August 1948, August 1949 and February 1952 respectively. Karachi and Lahore were in operation for about one year before an American Director of Library Service was assigned to the posts. There has been an American Director of Library Service at Dacca since shortly before it was opened.

The American librarian at Karachi is resigning shortly, the librarian's position at Lahore has been vacant for six weeks and the American librarian at Dacca, who has been Acting PAO for the past several months, is being transferred to another post in the immediate future. Replacements for these positions should be secured at once.

It is recommended that an American librarian be assigned to fill the vacancy or replace the present Directors of Library Service at the three centers in Pakistan as soon as possible.

2) Quarters

The Information Center at Karachi is well located in the business district of the city in a building entirely devoted to cultural activities. The space allotted to the Information Center consists of 14 rooms covering 3,569 sq. ft. with seats for 60 readers and 3,000 sq. ft. of terrace for warm weather out-door activities such as lectures, concerts, etc. These quarters are most adequate in location and size.

The Information Center at Lahore is located in the center of the city on the ground and first floors of a building separate from the rest of USIS. Three rooms with a total of 1,610 sq. ft. and seats for 35 readers make up the entire space. Though the display windows and the location are quite good, the amount of space is most inadequate. The Public Affairs Officer reports that adequate space is not available in Lahore. This lack of space has become a critically serious handicap. A membership of 11,000 cannot be adequately served in a library that seats only 35 people at one time. It is recommended that everything possible be done to remedy this situation as soon as it is possible.

The Information Center at Dacca has recently acquired new quarters in a building with FOA and other parts of USIS. There is a total of 2,850 sq. ft. allocated to the library. The exact location in the city, exhibit facilities and seating capacity is not known since the move into these new quarters has only just taken place. This new space is adequate in size and will enable the Center to increase its book collection and services to the public.

Recommendations

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CHILD ART
EXHIBITION-1956



on the occasion of
THE DIAMOND CUM PLATINUM
JUBILEE

of

Aitchison College Lahore





● NIMAZ
Irfan Majid
12 Years
Aitchison College, Lahore



THE dreamland of children, untainted by the complexities of the realistic world, is a domain which charms us as much with its fantasy and colour as it does with its complete innocence and unblemished expression. A painting of a child is not charming because of its symmetry and artistic completeness but for its integrity, frankness and unsophisticated approach to the world as it is seen by him.

It is in the boundless imagination, the innocent representation and the personal method of expression that we must seek to find the child's real personality and innate potentialities which are such a significant feature in the education of a child. Educationists have sought in the past and are still endeavouring to formulate a method of discovering individual talent and inclinations in order to set every child on the path God meant him or her to tread. Child art is perhaps serving its purpose towards this end in a larger measure than is commonly realised by us. It is a complete and well-balanced method for exhibiting child inclinations because it enables the child to express himself in the way he likes best and in the sequence he prefers.

Even child psychology has now admitted that the use of colours and paint brushes plays an important part in the mental satisfaction and

happiness of the child. He must be free and must have an opening to express in his own way his natural inhibitions and desires. The experience of handling the medium of painting unconsciously supplies the child with an outlet which consequently makes his mental growth healthy and prepares him to adjust himself to the problems of life. Thus a child's mental process of growth is assisted as much by art as it is by his environments. This, of course, is all subject to the child having complete freedom when he is painting. The child who is allowed and encouraged to function freely as an artist is merely learning to be a whole person. This technique is not followed by old school of thought which insists on the child being constantly guided and influenced by the teacher in his method of expression. Happily that old conception of child art education is now considered as obsolete as the use of a flickering candle in this age of electricity.

It is indeed gratifying to note the great interest taken by the children of our country in this first display of child art. I had never expected such a large number or variety of pictures to be entered for this exhibition. This has made me optimistic and I feel that this exhibition will help a great deal in the recognition, by educationists and teachers, of the importance of child art in this country. Now that the seed has been sown, let us hope and expect that it will be fully watered and cared for by the educational authorities in order that it may grow and bloom and occupy the position it deserves in the domain of child education as it does in all other advanced countries.

Our endeavour has been to select and present from this collection the paintings, drawings and sketches of children that are being produced in this country. This does not necessarily mean that the exhibition is in concurrence with the modern conception of freedom in child art. It is only a representation of what is being painted by the children under the present circumstances. Some of the work may have been suggested by teachers, some influenced and some even by the direct result of the teacher's desire to have his pupil's work exhibited. However, this should not be the pattern for future exhibitions and I would sincerely suggest to all the teachers to let the children paint as they wish.

Certain pictures have also been contributed and exhibited by the children who have produced them at home without any assistance or guidance. These may be copies from other pictures, but they have

been included to give enough encouragement to these children so that they continue to delve into the aesthetic world and derive benefit from their paintings and drawings. Their spontaneous creations will liberate their creative faculties and develop their powers of observation. The result of this encouragement will in itself give it full justification. It will stimulate in them the formation of taste, the awakening of an aesthetic need and their desire for contact with art and life. It will leave a deep impression on the child from both human and artistic points of view.

The underlying idea of this whole exhibition is not only to form a basis for future child art representations but also to encourage the children to paint and gain confidence in their work. This incidentally is sometimes unduly tempered with by parents and teachers who insist on ridiculing the work of these young artists. No teacher or parent should ever underestimate the value of even a very simple creation of his pupil. It should be regarded as something which is worthy of praise, and what is more important, something which is the outspoken result of the child's desire for expression which is an extremely important element in his growth.

This exhibition is also a pointer to the authorities concerned to take steps to improve the standard of child art education where it is required and encourage those institutions with better facilities where it has found its real importance.

Aitchison College is trying to take keen interest in raising the standard of art education and to afford an opportunity to all the children of Pakistan to exhibit their works by sponsoring this venture and providing the means to make it a nation-wide success. My thanks are due to the Lahore Art Circle, Mr. A.J. Shemza, and all those friends and friendly institutions which have provided valuable assistance in the preparation of this exhibition. Of course, we must not forget that the exhibition would not have been possible without the cooperation of various schools, colleges, and the children themselves. I am grateful to them all.

Lahore
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MOYENE NAJMI

Vita

Samina Iqbal was born on February 17, 1973, in Quetta, Pakistan and received her high school education from St. Joseph Convent School, Quetta. She received her BA from Government College Quetta in 1993, and her BFA from The National College of Arts Lahore, in 1997. She joined the University of Minnesota in 2000 and received her MFA in 2003. Besides being a teaching assistance for three years during her graduate studies at the University of Minnesota, she has taught studio arts at Appalachian State University North Carolina and Beaconhouse National University Lahore from 2005-2011.

Samina joined started the art history program at Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, Virginia in 2011 and since then she has received numerous fellowships and, travel grants from the Art History Department of VCU and external grants. She has been the recipient of The American Association of University Women (AAUW) dissertation-writing grant 2015-2016, a short-term fellow of The American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS) 2014. She also received The National Endowment for Humanities grant of 2013 to attend the “Summer Institution College and University Faculty Program,” in India. She has been the Hamad Bin Khalifa Fellow in 2014-15 and also Thalhimier Research Fellow in 2013-14 at the Department of Art History, Virginia Commonwealth University, VA. During her studies, she has presented several papers at international conferences in Pakistan, USA, and Qatar.

Besides teaching at VCU, Samina has worked with Dr. John Henry Rice, E. Rhodes, and Leona B. Carpenter Curator at Virginia Museum of Fine as a curatorial intern since 2012.