Chapter#6
MASTER CALLIGRAPHISTS OF PAKISTAN

The word calligraphy comes from two Greek words: kalli which means beautiful and graphia meaning writing. Islamic calligraphy has been developing since the revelation of the Holy Quran, for the purpose of keeping the record of the Holy verses. The Arabic letters make the Islamic calligraphy eye-pleasing because of the straight and curved flowing lines, along with dots and aarab. These elements give the artist a freedom to play with their forms. Islamic calligraphy has developed in the South Asian Subcontinent from the traditional Mughal illuminated manuscripts to the modern stylized calligraphic paintings. In addition to the Quranic verses, these modern painting are comprised of the poetic verses and sometimes the study of the individual letters.

There are several well known names of calligraphers in the history of Pakistani Art. A few of them are presented below.

7.1 Sadequain (1930 – 1987)

Apart from being a prominent painter Sadequain was also among the ones who introduced the painterly calligraphy for the first time in Pakistani art scene. The other person from the same category is Shakir Ali. He belonged to the family of calligraphers. His calligraphic paintings are composed of the same elements as those used in his paintings. The Arabic and Urdu letters take the shape of pointed blades and spikes. The calligraphy is linked with the background which is painted with relevance to the illustrated verse. The script has been written in black or white colour, with the contrasting background against which the calligraphy becomes prominent.

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Figure 7.1 Sadquain, Quranic Verses Calligraphy.

He has illustrated Surah Rahman, Surah Yaseen and the ninety nine names of Allah. Surah Rahman has been written three times on different surfaces i.e. canvas, cellophane and marble slabs, each time with different design. Surah Yaseen had been on display in the Lahore Museum on the wooden panels 260 feet long, while the names of Allah are displayed in the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies at Delhi, on a round wall of 2880 feet square.[33]

Figure 7.2 Sadquain, Quranic Verses of Surah Rahman, Calligraphy.

Moreover, he has also illustrated the poetry of Mirza Ghalib, Allama Iqbal and Faiz Ahmad Faiz. With these illustrations the relevant verses were calligraphed on the same or the adjacent panel.

Figure 7.3 Sadquain, Illustration of the Poetry of Allama Iqbal.

[33]S. Amjad Ali, Painters of Pakistan, 1st ed. (Islamabad: National book Foundation, 2000), 281.

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Apart from being a painter and calligrapher he was also a poet. He said, "Painting is moving towards poetry, poetry is moving towards calligraphy, and calligraphy is moving towards painting."[34] He wrote rubaiyat and illustrated them in pictorial form along with the Urdu text calligraphed in a panel within the same composition.

Figure 7.4 Sadquain, An Illustration from Sadequain's Rubiyat.

[34]Marcella Nesom Sirhandi, Contemporary Painting in Pakistan (Lahore: Ferozsons, 2006), 81.

7.2 SHAKIR ALI (1916 – 1975)

Along with Sadequain, Shakir Ali introduced the medium of painterly calligraphy. Being an abstract painter, he visualized the Arabic script as the abstract shapes of "arcs and loops, ovals and circles, vertical and horizontal lines."[35]

Figure 7.5 Shakir Ali, Ayat-ul-Kursi, Calligraphic Painting.

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For the three huge calligraphic murals he chose the script of elegant Ta'aliq. These murals hung at the Punjab Public Library, Lahore, the National Bank, Lahore, and Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Technology, near Islamabad. "He has greatly exaggerated the vertical strokes of the words, modified the recurring half-circles and generally shaped the style of writing according to his own requirements of design."[36]

The areas surrounding the words are filled with various textures and colours. The arrangement of the calligraphic linear patterns within the compositional space is made more splendid by the use of floral patterns.

The innovative calligraphic paintings by Shakir Ali became a source of inspiration for many artists including Anwar Jalal Shemza.

[35]Ali, Painters of Pakistan, 280.
[36]Ali, Painters of Pakistan, 280.

Figure 7.6 Shakir Ali, Quranic Verses, Calligraphic Painting.

Figure 7.7 Shakir Ali, Quranic Verses, Calligraphic Painting.

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7.3. Khurshid Alam Gohar Qalam (1956 – Present)

"Khursheed Alam's early education took place in the city of Sargodha under Ustad Ismail Dehlevi. Thereafter he studied under the late Hafiz Yousuf Sadidi who was one of the great masters of calligraphy of the contemporary Pakistan."[37]

"The title of Gohar Qalam was bestowed on him by the late Nafees Qalam, another master of calligraphy and by Professor Ghulam Nizamuddin of the University of Punjab. His major works include a copy of the Holy Quran placed in the main State Mosque known as the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad and includes 406 styles of calligraphy."[38]

Figure 7.8 Gohar Qalam, Surah Fatiha, Calligraphic Painting.

"He is a master of Lahori Nastaliq and also of the six other major scripts as have been practiced in South Asia. The present work is either on tree bark known as Bhuj Putter or alternatively on paper specially prepared in the Mughal techniques known as Wasli."[39]

Figure 7.8 Gohar Qalam, Surah Fatiha, Calligraphic Painting.

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[37]http://calligraphykhurshidgohar.com/ (accessed October 7, 2018).
[38]http://calligraphykhurshidgohar.com/ (accessed October 7, 2018).
[39]http://calligraphykhurshidgohar.com/about-us/ (accessed October 7, 2018).

"The style of calligraphy used is known as Hindustani Thuluth and this is different from the Ottoman school in that it is lighter. Other examples are Ghubari Naskh and a rare style of calligraphy known as Mufajjar. Gohar Qalam has been teaching for a number of years as the Professor of calligraphy at the National College of Arts."[40]
"Qalam is a master of many styles of calligraphy, including Lahori Nastaleeq,Thuluth Kufic, Muhaqiq,Nasakh, tughra,Dewani, Ruqqaa Sumbali, Tajaweedh, Moshahy, Jaleel, Thuluth-e-Kabeer, Narjiss, Ijazaa, Thuluthian, English Gothic. He is also a master of cubist calligraphic art."[41]

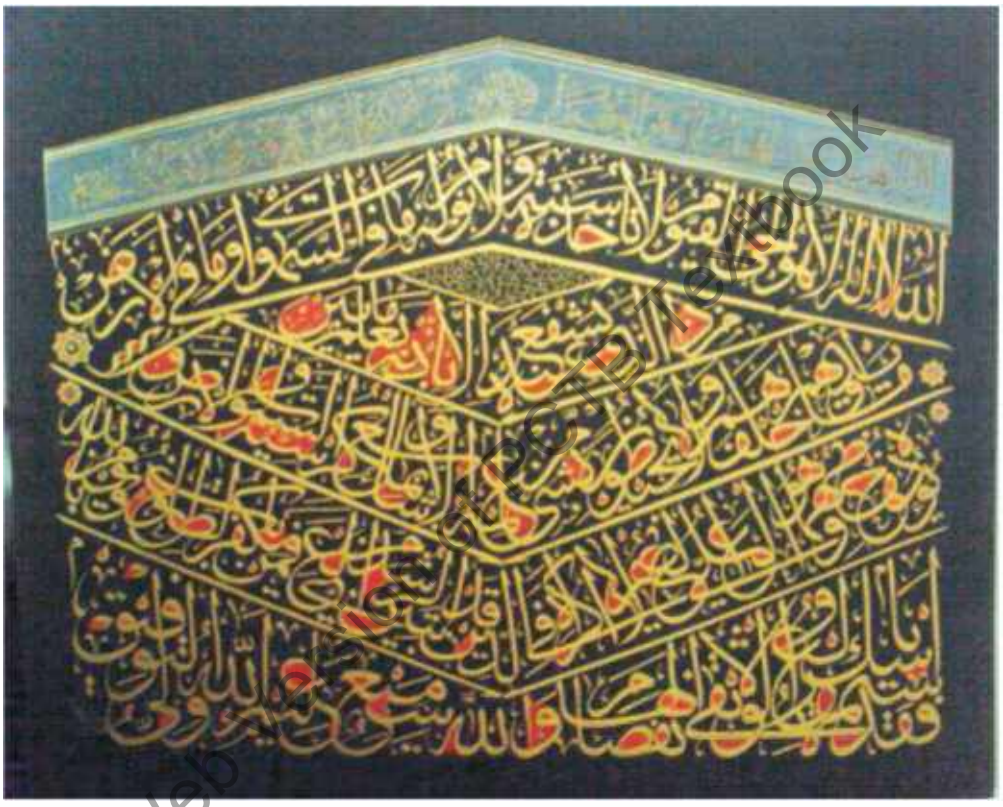

Figure 7.10 Gohar Qalam, *Ayat-ul-Kursi,* Calligraphic Painting.

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7.4. Gulgee (1926 – 2007)

One of the most multi-talented artists, Gulgee was a civil engineer by profession. He received art training and is famous for excellent portraiture, abstract paintings, mosaics, calligraphic paintings, and molding of calligraphy in the form of free standing sculptures.[42]
He never intended to be a calligraphic painter but a task assigned to him for the stall of Pakistan at the Expo 70 at Tokyo in 1970 to design a circular copper shield

[40]http://calligraphykhurshidgohar.com/about-us/ (accessed October 7, 2018).
[41]Emanuel Sarfraz, "The Sacred Art of Calligraphy," The Nation, June 26, 2017, https://nation.com.pk/26-Jun-2017/the-sacred-art-of-calligraphy (accessed October 7, 2018).
[42]Ali, Painters of Pakistan, 140.

with the symbols of Pakistani export products and central calligraphic inscriptions, marks the start of his contributions towards the art of calligraphy.[43]

In 1973 he began to paint calligraphy. The most famous of his calligraphic paintings is the one he painted for the Islamic Summit in 1974 at Lahore.

"It is full of multicoloured dots and daubs of colour, in which even gold and silver have been used. Against the background has been calligraphed a famous verse of the Quran exorting the Muslims 'to hold fast to the rope of God and not to disunite.' These words sweep in an arc from the bottom right to the top left corner. The style of writing is roughly in the Naskh script rather freely rendered."[44]

A mural at the King Faisal Hospital in Riyadh has his calligraphy in gold and silver of the Quranic verses regarding healing of health.

The style of action painting that he practiced also inspired his calligraphic paintings with the bold and spontaneous strokes with a thickly loaded brush. This is the style that raised him to the fame un-paralleled in the art of calligraphy. The brush was loaded with many different colours to create cursive forms with force and freedom. Strokes were not applied in straight line, instead there were arcs covering most of the canvas surface.

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Figure 7.11 Gulgee Calligraphic Painting with Bold Strokes.

[43] Ali, Painters of Pakistan, 291.
[44] Ali, Painters of Pakistan, 291.

Figure 7.12 Gulgee Calligraphic Painting with Bold Strokes and Gold Leaf.

Apart from paintings, his calligraphic sculptures of copper are also famous in which he has molded the Surah Rahman.

Figure 7.13 Gulgee, Calligraphic Sculpture with verses of The Quran, at State Bank Museum Karachi.

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