



RESEARCH PAPER

A Review of the Relationship between Art, Culture, Heritage and Nostalgia

Anila Zulfiqar*¹ Dr. Sumera Jawad² Dr Memoona Khan³

1. Assistant Professor, College of Art & Design, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Professor, College of Art & Design, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan
3. Professor, Department of Fine Arts, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

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***Corresponding Author**

anila226pk@hotmail.com

This research paper intends to explore the relationship between art, culture, heritage and nostalgia. It reviews the purpose and philosophy of art from ancient to the present times, and also explores the influences of culture and heritage on art. The specific focus is on how the nostalgic emotions become a source of inspiration for an artist in the creation of the pieces of art. It also identifies the relations and associations of an artist with his surroundings. The qualitative research method has been adopted for contextual and formal analysis. The extrinsic and intrinsic approaches have been employed to interpret and explain the data. The study concluded that ideas or vision of an artist is shaped through the cultural and social norms. Art serves as a significant platform to materialize an artist's inspirations, drawn from his nostalgia with the bygone days and the objects and surroundings associated therewith. Cultural, social norms and heritage provide the subject, whereas nostalgia projects emotions and art express these emotions onto the surface of the canvas.

Introduction

The creation of art has been a common phenomenon with every civilization in the human history. More significantly, the prehistoric art defines strong vision and ideologies about social and cultural happenings of that era. Producing art is a natural human activity; however, meaning of art has varied over the course of time. (Williams & Wilson, 2000, p.4). Subjectivity, objectivity and metaphysics are the three basic concepts in art which express or explore artist's feelings and expressions. Under the subjective approach an artist observes and draws inspiration from nature; but paints as he feels. In the objective stance, the artist paints the objects as they are in real, while remaining closer to their perception. In the metaphysical, things can be beyond physical and might not emerge from the conscious level. The researcher studied these concepts to explore the reality of the creation and innovation in art. The culture and heritage stimulated ideas in artist, and nostalgic emotions forced to

imitate heritage to project his emotions. So the artist imitates a reality to reshape a new idea.

Literature Review

Art is considered a branch of philosophy called aesthetics that defines and analyzes the psychology of the artists and of the people experiencing it. The intrinsic value of the experience is called art (Swanson, 2006, p. 3). The art ideologies and philosophical concepts are always based on norms of a society. The basic roots of a culture are its heritage, which helps to develop the norms of a society that add new elements, which sooth requirement of contemporary eras of any age. In fact, heritage includes ideas and memories which have been passed on from previous generations.

In 1770, the first meaning of nostalgia was recorded as homesickness or melancholia, caused by prolonged absence from home. The second meaning of nostalgia is regret and sorrowful longing conditions of the past age and regretful or wistful memory or recall of earlier times (Stephens, 2009, p. 64). There are two types of nostalgia: Restorative and reflective which are basically different attitudes toward the past. Restorative nostalgia involves a desire to “rebuild the lost home,” views the past with an eye toward recreating it—a desire to re-experience those special moments (Gizela. 2018). Through art activities the artists restore their past experiences. Researches prove that music and videos have a potential nostalgic component which could activate a reflection of the past. Reflective nostalgia is like as an autobiographical past that provides an aesthetic distance allowing enjoyment of a memory in the same way as one relishes a movie or a good book.

Historical Background

The analysis of the art history proves that an artist’s inspirations and expressions develop through the connections with nature or surroundings. So the idea that art copies nature has been one of the fundamental assumptions of the Western art throughout most of its history falling out of favor only in Middle Ages reviving back in full force in Renaissance period (Gelernter, 1995, p. 54).

The art ideologies and philosophies are always based on norms of a society. In the end of the nineteenth century, realistic imagery fell out of favor in the West when art became increasingly less representational. Aristotle was the first to explain that humans everywhere need to make sense of their societies by communicating their ideas with each other (Raheb-Mol, 1998, p.2). Art is one of the sources of communication. The cultural influence on art has been observed through ample examples from art history. The basic roots of a culture are its heritage, which helps to develop the norms of a society that add new elements, which sooth requirement of contemporary eras of any age. In fact, heritage includes ideas and memories which have been passed on from previous generations.

History acknowledges that Pakistan inherited rich and ancient traditions of art. Pakistani’s art roots are connected with Mehr Garh Civilization, so the birth of art is as ancient as the birth of man in this region (Possehl, 2002, p.25). The human and animal figurines molded and carved years ago, almost in 5000 BC reveal a lively appreciation of natural forms. Sculpture reached its zenith during Gandhara. Pakistani region has unique history of painting since Vedic times. Most of the art

works of this period have been lost but there are references in ancient texts that speak highly of the painters' skill in capturing nature and life. The school of frescos from Buddhist period, in the subsequent centuries, followed similar ideas (Walsh, 2006, p.12). The Sultanate period 13th to 16th centuries AD prepared the ground for the great school of Mughal miniature paintings, which brought about a synthesis of Persian, Central Asian and native Indian traditions (Parkash, 2005, P.194). Punjab was annexed by the British in 1857 and painters tried to introduce a new direction in the visual arts of the Punjab States. European influences had actually been introduced as early as the 16th century and British introduced Victorian art to local artists and these inspired many of them to paint local scenes, places, life and people.

The term "nostalgia" was actually coined by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in 1688 and it is thought as the psychological suffering caused by unrelenting yearning to return to one's homeland. For Davis Fred (he is an unaligned nondual spiritual teacher, and transformative philosopher), nostalgia is emotional experience embodying various needs and desires to engage with past for a sense of continuity and the sake of identity (Smith and Bondi, 2016, p. 190).

Nostalgic memories are meaningful memories and when the people revisit these memories they later report a great sense of meaning in life. Nostalgic memories involve the life experiences that people cherish (Routledge, 2015, p.99). Nostalgia is the interplay between self and effect, which is based on mood state, and self-focused attention. It is said that evoking nostalgically about a previous period of life can help to lift spirits and boost feelings of hope and optimism.

Relationship between Art, Culture, Heritage and Nostalgia

Any human movement which is transmuted for a cause is labeled as art. Albert Einstein while differentiating art from science opines:

Something observed and experienced and communicated through logical language is an engagement with science. When a similar observation and experience is expressed intuitively through forms other than language, and which are alien to the conscious mind, we are dealing with art (Marshall, 2007, p. 35).

Van Gogh described art as pleasing and refreshing expressions. Vincent Van Gogh wrote a letter to Theo; his brother, that he was painting (figure.1) some big sunflowers to brighten up the room of his artist friend Paul Gauguin, who was coming to stay with him. In the morning when he would open the window, he would be rejoiced by the green garden and the rising sun. The sun-soaked garden would enter the room through the medium of the painting. So, art's revelation can treat people to a delightful surprise, like the joy they feel on the discovery of something or on meeting a friend (Swanson, 2006, p. 3). He paints what he perceives but unconsciously adds what he knows or imagines about that object. He combines the real with the ideal like Van Gogh's painting projected the energy of the sun by combining the real and the ideal.



Figure.1 *Sun flowers* (1888)

Van Gogh

Oil on canvas, 92.1 x 73 cm

Collection: The National Gallery London

Victoria Charles, *Vincent van Gogh* (New York: Parkstone International, (2012), 91.

The copying of reality joined to a conceptual or imaginative aspect is linked with ancient Greek philosophers; Plato and Aristotle. They established philosophical ideas on art and beauty which are valid even to this day. They argue that an artist imitates nature so that the work of art becomes the reflection of nature which, for them, is the fundamental principle of art, called mimesis. The school of mimesis stated that creating a work of art is like holding a mirror up to nature - the artist reflects what he sees (Swanson, 2006, p. 5). Although the artist has different visions about the purposes of imitation in art.

Every man is associated with his traditions consciously and unconsciously. Geographical factors, historical background of a region play a vital role to build up the vision of a nation. It is understood that highly rich and artistic cultural heritage inspired the native people. Heritage is basically of two types: Cultural and Natural Heritage. Cultural Heritage depicts customs, religious and social practices, artistic expressions and values of a society.

Cultural heritage can be tangible or intangible. Tangible heritage encompasses those prominent places such as the monuments which signify the history and culture of the area.

Intangible heritage refers to traditional music, folklore, and language etc. In other words physical and metaphysical experiences inspire the artistic activities which are part of the culture of any region. In the process of creating art, tangible and intangible/physical and metaphysical experiences develop an image on the surface of a canvas. An artist observes tangible heritage but intangible heritage transforms through genes in human. Science proves that genetic memory/ knowledge transformed naturally from one generation to another like body structure, facial expressions, likings and disliking etc. It means man is influenced by his belongings

and surroundings. Culture covers all that makes up way of life of its people. Cultural inspirations can be observed through the subjects an artist selects to represent.

Pakistan is a rich and diverse in all forms of art and culture. Lahore is considered as the cultural capital, having cultural events and festivals throughout the year. The Walled City of Lahore signifies century's old civilization with influences not only of Afghans, Tughlaqs, Lodhis, Hindus, Mughals, Sikhs and the British but even older than that. (Cavendish, 2007, P.413) In the decades that followed the nation's independence, a few artists of Pakistan adopted modernism as a representation for change and economic freedom, as they wanted to meet Europeans standards. They adopted styles popular in all over the world, but many of them are also experimenting with native traditions of art. They are painting the cultural and artistic traditions of the region in realistic manners.

The artists of Lahore are linked its culture in one way or the other. Depicting Lahore in images is an old practice and the old-city has generated many famous painters. Lahore was full of artists and naqqāsh when British captured Punjab (Srivastava, 1983, 49).

Muslim painters resided in Lahore included Amir Bakhsh, Mohd Bakhsh, Mirān Bakhsh, Imām Bakhsh, Karm Bakhsh, Karim Bakhsh and Pīr Bakhsh etc.



Figure. 2 *Chawk Matti* (1990)

Ajaz Anwar

Water Colour. 76 x 157 cm

Private Collection

Aijaz Anwar, *Forty Years of Painting
"Reminiscences of Old Lahore"* (Lahore,
Ahsan Tariq Printers, Year NA), 96.



Figure.3 *Suhni Mahiwāl* (1923)

Ustad Allah Bakhsh

Oil on Canvas. 59 x 50 cm,

Collection:Punjab Council of Art,
Lahore

Ijaz ui-Hassan, *Painting in Pakistan*
(Lahore: Ferozsos, 1991), 40.

Paintings of Ajāz Anwar, a Lahore based artist, are considered the true reflection of the heritage of Lahore (figure.2). His paintings highlight the old buildings of Lahore Punjab was annexed by the British in 1857 and painters tried to introduce a new direction in the visual arts of the Punjab States that must be preserved. The main focus of his paintings is not human figures. People are not important in his paintings because they are born and reborn, whereas these buildings, once destroyed, will be lost forever (Naqvi, 1998, p.606).

Ustād Allah Bakhsh, another son of the soil of Lahore, the most talented painter of Pakistan known for who portrayed the rural life of Punjab. He belonged to the small town of Wazirabād, he cemented his name as a painter of folklore on his canvases. Although the basic theme of painter's work revolves around the local and folk cultural heritage, but his work is also said to be inspired by classical western art, which is reflected through the paintings of Hindu mythological characters. He is recognized for his own unique and distinct style of paintings which include lots of faces with different moods and expressions. His paintings are highly expressive and each painting holds a complete tale in itself. His masterpieces include *Suhni Mahīwāl*, (figure.3) *Tālim-e Hush Rūba*, *Hīr-Rānjha*, *Suhni Dharti* and the rural life and landscape of Punjab.

In the art subjects and content, there are two different things. The subject refers to the objects depicted by the artist, content refers to the artistic expressions in his work. It is also described as the "meaning" of the work. In literature, it is called the "theme." Content describes the artist's attitude toward his subject. The idealist theory of art describes actual work of art as non-physical: it is an idea and emotion in an artist's mind. The idea is given physical expression and is modified through the artist's involvement with the particular artistic medium, but the art work itself remains in the artist's mind (Warburton, 2013, 162).

The subjective meaning is any personal meaning, consciously or unconsciously conveyed by the artist through his own association of certain objects, actions or colours with past experiences (Warburton, 2013, 162). The researcher uses the word "Nostalgia" to describe sentimental relations with the past, which is shown typically for a period or place with personal associations (Stroup, 2017, p.135). The sentimental feelings are associated with particular time (childhood) and place, which shows personal associations.

How do nostalgic expressions play a role in art? What is the basic relationship of art and nostalgia? Nostalgia, according to the research studies, can stimulate the process of creativity. Past association are instrumental in lending people a better understanding of their surroundings as well as a sense of certainty about future, thereby paving the way for creativity.

These recollections of one's past are usually important events; one cares about people and places where one has spent time. Music and weather can also be strong triggers of nostalgia. Nostalgia contains a "wistful pleasure, a joy tinged with sadness added, as nostalgia contains psychological pain. Nostalgia is thought to enhance self-esteem and identity. Nostalgic expressions are always the part of art expressions throughout the art history. Memories are the source of inspirations for the artists. In 18th- and 19th-centuries Romantic landscape painters like J.M.W. Turner (figure.4) and John Constable (figure.5) frequently painted legendary

countryside, touching on a widespread nostalgic yearning for the pastoral, bountiful rural life thought to have been lost as a result of the Industrial Revolution.



Figure.4 *Dido building Carthage* (1815)
J.M.W. Turner

Oil on canvas. 232 x 155 cm

Collection: National Gallery, London

Source: January 6, 2020

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/joseph-mallord-william-turner-dido-building-carthage>



Figure.5 *Hay Wain* (1821)
John Constable

Oil on canvas. 130 x 185 cm

Collection: The National Gallery,
London

Source: January 6, 2020

<https://www.researchgate.net/figure/John-Constable-The-Hay-Wain-1821-oil-on-canvas-130-x-185-cm-Collection-of->

Contemporary American artists felt nostalgic for his homeland of the 1950s (in search of a simpler, more peaceful time) through a focus on mid-century's iconography, such as cars and the open roads. Famous world over, for his masterful preservation of the naïf painting style, Michel Delacroix (born in Paris in 1933) devoted five decades to painting a city "The Paris of then," (figure.6). He spent most of his life in this city and his work shows his passionate feelings for his beloved city. The artist main sources of inspirations are from his early life reminiscences, during World War II. He paints Paris with his imagination and depicts Paris as an idealized world that amuses the viewers.

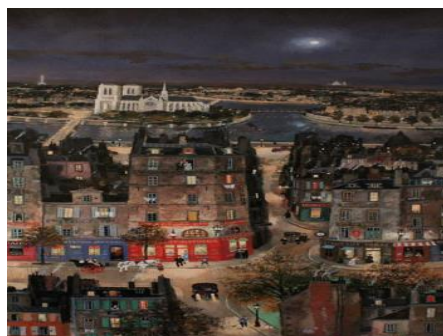


Figure.6 *Grand Paris* (1997)
Michel Delacroix

Acrylic on canvas. 110 x 60 cm

Hugo Galeria gallery in New York

Source: January 6, 2020

Michel Delacroix, <http://2448artspace.com/artist/160>

Results and Discussions

The analysis of art from different regions shows the vital impact of heritage and cultural influences. For example, in the selection of colours, lines, shapes, and motives reflect the cultural norms. For instance, different colours symbolize different meanings, in different cultures around the world. Inspirations from colours develop through cultural, social, geographical and climatic factors. Colours have shaped emotions, and beliefs of different cultures through the ages. Like red is considered for passion and excitement in Western cultures and also associated with the meanings of danger. In Christian culture red colour is used with green to celebrate Christmas rituals. In Eastern and Asian cultures red colour is the colour of happiness and joy. It is believed that red colour is the source to bring luck and long life. For some Latin American nations, red is the color of religion, when used with white. Middle Eastern Red evokes feelings of danger and caution, while some others consider it the colour of evil.

The analysis of art history shows the cultural and heritage difference make impact on Eastern and Western art, because even paintings of both the regions have evident differences in their artistic languages, painting materials and expressive subject matter. The main reason is their geographical locations that are different from each other, East belongs to the river civilizations, and the Western countries are mostly influenced by the maritime civilizations. Eastern people advocate nature, the Western people advocate heroism, adhere to the pursuit of truth. Eastern people attach importance to intuitive thinking, while western painters use rational thinking. Oriental art in this context adopts "line" as the main artistic language and use various qualities of line, and its thickness to show the degree of expression and aesthetic feelings. While, the West takes colour, face, contour, volume as the artistic language, therefore, Western painting is mostly rich in color, the outline is clear, geometric effect and three-dimensional sense is very obvious (Dai, 2019) Jonathan Plucker claims that nostalgia allows for the retrieval of additional information from the brain than usual which can later be deployed for creativity. In fact, nostalgia bridges the gulf between past and present to bring forth innovative ideas.

Conclusion

Art history reveals that an artist searches, explores and then records his experiences in his art. Art is knowledge and the knowledge of the individual. Theoretically the artist is a person who comes to know himself, to know his own emotions (Collingwood, 1938, p. 291). The research prove that thought process of knowing is started from early period. An artist observations of his surroundings help him to understand the relations with society. His experiences developed his emotions. Cultural norms made him aware about values. Heritage provided knowledge about his roots, building strong connection with history. Nostalgic feelings took an artist into his imaginative world and he started feeling himself again in that particular period of his early life in a unique way. Nostalgic feelings forced him to reshape his emotions in a new way through his art.

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