

Expression of Radical Feminism in Pakistani Painting Depicting Pain to Highlight Oppression

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Abstract

Feminism, although, born and developed in the West in the populist use of the term, it travelled to the East with a distributed use and prevalence. In Pakistan, the feminist sensibility gained momentum in the 1980s, when General Muhammad Zia-ul Haq imposed Martial Law with a censorship policy curbing freedom of expression. The conservative approach to Islam furthered a kind of oppression and social injustice on women and as a result we observe various responses in literature and art. This paper shows how female artists of Pakistan highlighted the gender discrimination and social injustice in Pakistan. The paintings have been discussed in terms of their content and have been contextualized in the larger discourse of feminism and gender construction. It is argued that the expression of feminist perspectives in the paintings of 1980s and onwards is radical as it challenges institutions and engages the viewers into a dialogue with value system by showing suffering of women.

Introduction

We live in a world where certain ideological, economic, and cultural paradigms shape who we are and how we think. Even if nature tries to maintain a distinction between male and female species, the social reality, based on these distinctions, provides additional criteria for constructing identities. When it comes to social and cultural constructs, gender mythology is one of the most fundamental ones. Our talks, desires, habits, and traditions all revolve around it. It serves as a foundation for our social institutions' philosophies and operations, as well as a motivator for both individual and group activities and as a cause of discrimination on numerous levels. The fact that we are born into a society where gender segregation is widespread and multi-layered is seen as a given and irrefutable fact of our life. There is a great deal more to learn about gender construction if we take a step back and look at the facts.

When it comes to constructing gender, scholars who have studied the subject believe it is not something we are born with and possess, but rather something we do (Chodorow, 1995). Sexual classification is biological in nature, whereas gender is the social expression of biological sexuality (Rosario, 2004). Gender appears to flow naturally from one's biological identity due to the close relationship between the inherent disposition of sex and the social construction of gender. We can only understand how gender is socially formed through cross-cultural comparisons. Though patriarchy has dominated social reality for centuries, women have played many different roles within this framework, particularly in the twentieth century.

Women's roles in society and social views toward them vary dramatically between countries, even those with similar institutions or economic growth. Religion, method of production, political ideologies, legal systems, family structures, cultural paradigms, and economic opportunities are all associated with the development of female identity (Bernstein, 2005). Women's identities are more limited in Third World countries because of the aforementioned reasons. The social construction of the female gender has been challenged mainly by the movement of Feminism.

Feminists shared the belief that women's oppression was linked to their sexuality because feminism is concerned with females as a social category as well as a biological category. As a result, women have been

viewed as inferior to men because of their biological differences, which were reflected in society's structure (Bartlett, 1987). Even if feminism is a theory, social movement, or political movement, it emphasises women's experiences and highlights the various forms of oppression that the female gender has been subjected to throughout history in society. Feminism, whether it is viewed as a social movement or a political movement, focuses on the daily experiences of women and the oppression they face in society. In Patriarchal societies, Feminists understand what it means to be a “woman” because they can feel and experience the pain and suffering of women. Because of this, feminists work to eliminate all obstacles that prevent women from achieving equal social, political, and economic status with men, and they reject the idea that a woman's value is solely based on her gender or that women are inherently inferior, subservient, or less intelligent than men in general.

Depending on the time, culture, and country, this movement had different causes and goals. During the course of its development, liberal and radical perspectives emerged in the West, which travelled to Third World countries as well. The following paper elaborates upon the feminist perspectives that informed the work of female Pakistani painters. It shows how different variations within Feminism can be seen as expressed in constructing female identity through painting.

Feminist Painting in Pakistan

Postcolonial theorists have argued that feminist principles, like many others in the West, are ethnocentric and fail to take into account the particular challenges faced by women in developing countries and other oppressed groups (Bulbeck, 1998). Gender parity, liberation from patriarchy and hate of women, as well as a rejection of the assumption that women are fundamentally less intelligent than men, are all central to the feminist ideal, which has been articulated by prominent feminists throughout recent decades (See Rubio-Marín & Kymlicka, 2018).

The patriarchal nature of Pakistani society is evident in the country's social and cultural context. The worlds of men and women are conceptually divided (Moghadam, 1992). The home is defined as a woman's legitimate ideological and physical space, whereas the world outside the home is dominated by men. Purdah and the concept of honour in Pakistan are used to maintain a false ideological divide between the public and private, the inside and outside worlds (Shaheed, 2009). Male honour is closely linked to women's sexuality, which is seen as a potential threat to the family's honour in the Middle East (Riaz & Rafi, 2019). Purdah, sex segregation, and violence against women are used to restrict and control women's movement. Although patriarchy has spread throughout the world, it is not evenly distributed. Jamshaid Ahmed points out that women's oppression/subordination varies from region to region, class to class, and rural to urban (Ahmed & Ansari, 2011). Traditional customs in the rural and tribal areas establish male authority and power over women, making patriarchal structures more prevalent. In marriages, women are traded, sold, and purchased. They are only given a limited number of choices from which to choose to alter their realities. Women in the upper and middle classes, on the other hand, are increasingly able to pursue higher education and gain greater control over their lives.

For both men and women, patriarchal norms are most powerfully influenced by social and cultural contexts. The patriarchal ideology is internalised by women as they learn to be a woman in society, and they play an important role in the socialisation process of their children by transferring and recreating the gender ideology (Shahnaz et al., 2020). It's a different story, however, when it comes to the portrayal of female characters in the arts.

Since Pakistan's founding till now, there have been three distinct phases of women's activism. After Pakistan's formation in 1947, the country's nationalists requested that personal laws and access to public services be

given precedence over those of other citizens. Movements against the anti-women measures enforced by General Zia ul Haq under the guise of "Islamization of Pakistan" began in the 1980s. Using the guise of Islamization of the state, he implemented a number of legislations that sought to empower women in society. While advocating for women's rights and raising slogans such as "chaddar aur chaar dewari," he placed restrictions on their emancipation through state legislation (women should cover their bodies fully and remain confined within the four walls of home). One of his laws was the "Hudood Ordinance," which stated that if a woman was the victim of rape, she had to show four devout Muslim males as eyewitnesses. As a result, she is accused of adultery and given 100 lashes if she cannot comply. A substantial percentage of women were accused of adultery when they sought justice because of this ordinance's adoption. Rather than just placing responsibility on women's sexuality, this rule facilitated men's abuse of women because the state stood silent. A lot of women were first raped and then charged with hudood, which inflamed feminists at the time, resulting in a number of cases (Shabir & Mahmood, 2020).

Women's Action Forum was founded by women from the second movement, who belonged to the country's urban middle class and had attended Western institutions (WAF). Feminist political writing was prolific during this time period, with an emphasis on boosting women's political participation. Within this wave, drafted in 1983, the manifesto declared by women artists of Pakistan stated:

We the women artists of Pakistan, having noted with concern the decline in status and condition of the life of Pakistani women, and having noted the effects of the anti-reason, anti-arts environment on the quality of life in our homeland, and having noted the significant contribution which the pioneering women artists have made to the cause of arts and art education in Pakistan and believing as we do in the basic rights of all men, women and children to a life free from want and enriched by the joys of fruitful labour and cultural self-realization and our commitments as Practitioners and teachers of the arts to the noblest ideals of a free, rational and civilized existence, affirm the following principles to guide us in our struggle for the cultural development of our people to serve as the manifesto of the women artists of Pakistan (Hashmi, 2002, p. 91).

The most powerful expression of feminism, which can be called Radical Feminism can be seen in the work of the following artists.

Salima Hashmi

Salima Hashmi is noted for her lifetime dedication to social reform, which she received from her father Faiz Ahmed Faiz, a world-renowned poet and revolutionary. She was able to communicate her disapproval of social injustice in a variety of ways because of her keen awareness of it and her revolutionary spirit. One of those ways was via the medium of art. She was well-aware of society's various aspects of ugliness, which she expertly captured in the artwork seen below (figure 1). The amorphous blue layer is placed to the off-white backdrop layer to symbolise tranquilly. After that, a rusty liquid and eventually blood is splattered across the screen. An example of this contradiction and disruption is the administration of Zia ul Haq, which denied women basic rights and dictated to them how they should dress, interact and portray themselves in society.

Among Salima's most recurring themes are the motifs seen in this artwork. Despite the fact that her paintings appear to be abstract, they do contain elements that establish the overall theme of her work. The repeating images in this painting are either blurry or distorted. Throughout the piece, we see an abstracted portrait of an unidentified woman shrouded in Chadar. Her pain and paradoxical composure in the face of adversity may be clearly seen. The outline of a demonic face appears next to her, but it's hard to tell what it looks like. Salima is outspoken in her criticism of Zia ul Haq's treatment of women. Zia ul Haq's authoritarian morality is vividly depicted in the deplorably obscure figure that we see. This certainly refers to him. The loss of basic autonomy

and the distortion of core traits can only be a result of a forcefully enforced ethical system. This picture and the age of Zia's government are both examples of a society that is primed for upheaval, unrest, and slaughter.

During Zia ul Haq's rule, Pakistanis witnessed some of the most perverse and misleading tactics ever employed by a government. Zia's efforts to "Islamize" the country was meant to deflect attention from his crimes while also entangling the public in an extreme ideology. Women had fewer rights than males and were consigned to inferior social positions during his rule. Demoralization of women was not limited to only one method. A taboo was associated with the female presence in society because of severe penalties for premarital sex and prohibited depictions of the female body in art and film. As a result, women's liberation slowly dwindled, leaving behind oppression and a deep sense of exclusion from society.

With her own unique way of expression, Salima perfectly captures and emphasises this rejection in the following work (figure 2). Only a cloth-covered female face can be made out in the artwork, as there are no other people depicted. There is no counterpoise figure in Salima's picture that can be blamed for the mistreatment of women. The stifling of women's voices in social issues is what she focuses on instead. In today's environment, one's needs are met to the degree of one's communication skills. Those who lack this talent are confined to the confines of prison and eventually fade away from the fabric of social reality. Salima's depiction of a lady stuck in an ice cube perfectly captures this state of affairs. Her appearance fades with time, yet she stays mute and submissive to a dictatorial regime.

Rabia Zuberi

Rabia Zuberi is one of the few Pakistani artists who have had a significant impact on the country's art landscape. As a young artist, she came to Pakistan in 1961 with high ambitions for making a contribution to this country's culture. In only a few short years, she founded Pakistan's first post-partition art school, the Karachi School of Art. As an artist and art promoter, she has made great strides in her career because of her genuine devotion to society. As the director of an art institute, she has developed a strong sense of social responsibility and a desire to improve people's lives.

Throughout her life, Rabia has been driven to paint expressively by her desire for universal harmony and agreement. Though the majority of her work was sculptural, she felt the need to use many different mediums to get her point through, despite the fact that sculpture was her primary focus. For her, social conditions have a significant influence on people's lives and their well-being. For her, art is meant to reflect and alter social situations, because she believes that without reforming society, we can never aspire to become better people. As a result, people look to her to engage in conversation about the current social atmosphere on the fly. Her painting 'Quest for Peace' remarkably expresses the plight of women (figure 3).

It was made in the late 1980s, during a time when Sindh, particularly Karachi, was experiencing some of its most violent confrontations ever. The rule of Zia ul Haq was also taking place during this time period. When she learned about the unrest in the city where she lived, she did all in her power as an artist to try to alleviate the situation. Rabia is a staunch supporter of tolerance and harmony, and she is genuinely disturbed by any hint of conflict or violence. In the painting, she uses the universal symbol of the pigeon to express a genuine call for peace in response to the current problems, not merely depicting the unsettled human state.

One of the Paintings (figure 4) depicts Rabia's disdain for authority was created under Zia ul Haq's repressive rule. 'Blind Justice,' offers further proof of Zia's corrupt and brutal administration. When it comes to fundamental human rights, Rabia has no regard for distinctions based on race, religion, or culture. In a crisis-ridden society ruled by hegemonic power, she believes that humanism is the most important cause to fight for. In the picture, two blocks are separated by broad linear borders that appear to be formed of concrete. The block above has a huge, triangular-shaped head of a female figure who has her eyes covered with a white

stripe, rendering her completely blind. Symbolically, the figure depicts justice that is blinded by the power of others. An important distinction must be noted in terms of justice when it comes to blindness. One meaning of blindness is the absence of bias in the administration of justice, regardless of a person's race, ethnicity, religion, culture, or social status. The second type of blindness is one that is influenced by power and can be influenced via the use of money or political influence. While the first sort of blindness enables a just and equal society, the second kind allows for sinister forces to function in the world. This type of ignorance that ignores the cries of downtrodden people is something that Rabia fights against. They are represented by their hands, which extend up and seem to make a loud collective appeal for justice. She is perceptive in this regard. Rabia employs a dark colour palette and stiff geometric forms to envelop her subjects in gloom. This depiction evokes feelings of oppression and disillusionment, while also emphasising Rabia's steadfastness in the face of such injustice.

Laila Shahzada

Laila Shahzada was a pioneer of contemporary art. She was well-deserving of her national and worldwide acclaim. She experimented with a wide range of subjects, from seaside scenes in Karachi to the treasures of the Indus Valley Civilization. In spite of this, her deep connection to her own nation was evident in all of her work. Throughout her creative development, she was exposed to Western artistic trends and engaged with them as well as her peers. This fusion of eastern sensibilities and western media effectively elevated her skill to new heights. Changes to her perspective on her own life, as well as the political, cultural, and social setting in which she lives, would be profound.

Late in her career, Laila's work tends to focus more on her own thoughts and feelings, as well as her interactions with the outside world. While working as an expressionist artist at this period, she expressed herself in a very personal way. When the viewer's perceptual associations are elevated to an emotional connection, the artist's brushwork with sharply contrasted curves and vibrant colour themes is at its best. She explores the role of women in Pakistani society in the artwork seen below (figure 5). These paintings were done under the Zia ul Haq government and are part of the 'Chadar aur Char diwari,' series. She used her expressive use of colour to study female identity, and the changes that are forced by the conformist and strict framework of male-dominated thought in this passage.

To say that Laila's art is unique would be an understatement. Her work displays the items in three dimensions. The dynamic link between the observer and the formal aspects of painting is enhanced by her attention to depth and the continual addition of varied hues to each colour. The curvy outlines of a traditional lady are shown in this artwork, with her head veiled in a crimson veil. A woman's life in today's culture is a whirlwind, and the swirling brushwork in this painting captures that.

Laila Shahzada was a gifted artist with a kind heart. During Zia ul Haq's dictatorship, the picture depicting her strong sensitivity was painted. It's clear that Laila wants the spectator to focus on the emotional content of the painting in this piece, yet she lets them explore the painting's complex formal features. As someone inclined toward liberalism and progressivism, she was outspoken in her criticism of Zia ul Haq's repressive administration. The above artwork is not a spontaneous reaction to the enslavement of women under Zia ul Haq's government but rather a meditation on the effects on women of a hegemonic authority. She's aware of the suppleness of the female soul. Dissatisfaction with the arbitrary nature of authority has emerged in our culture, where women are expected to alter and conform to the whims and demands of males, especially those in power. Either the status quo is quietly accepted or a revolution is launched under such circumstances. Laila uses dismal blues to accentuate the melancholy and restrained state of the feminine soul as she observes and regrets the preponderance of the first example. There has been a steady stream of repression against women throughout history, which is depicted in the painting's curving lines and the many draperies that envelop and

shape its female subject. The melancholy that underlies the formal delineations of painting is given life in Laila's three-dimensional representation of the figure wrapped in whirling fabric. It appears as though an aureole or nimbus is emanating from the female figure's interior, implying that she retains her integrity and dignity despite the chaotic circumstances that surround and define her passive life.

Nahid Raza

Nahid Raza is one of the most prominent feminists. Nahid's work has a deep cultural resonance and is richly textured. She has spoken out against the exploitation of women, but she has also praised the virtues of being a woman. A Pakistani mother raised her in a conservative household, and she was unable to accept any deviation from the norm for boys. Due to the support of her artist uncle, Ali Imam, she was able to pursue a career in the arts. Her thoughts were influenced by the prevailing male chauvinism she encountered in Karachi's art circles. Because of her divorce and the burden of raising her children by herself, she became an even stronger advocate for women's rights and a feminist icon. Her artistic expression became even more abstract after her time in the United States, where she studied art. Her compositions are rich in texture and content because her art was conceptualized with a deep understanding of the subject matter. Taking inspiration from the strength and tenacity she has demonstrated in her own life; she chooses the female form as the primary representation of her triumph over adversity. Art has been a source of strength for her throughout her life, according to her own words.

She depicts the fragility of the female body in her painting 'Shared Miseries' (figure 6), which has a rough surface and abundant use of primary colours. Like many of her paintings, the figures are arranged in a system of frames that lead the viewer into the depths of her thoughts. Symbols of passion, vigour, and optimism are conveyed through the use of red and yellow hues. One of her paintings, "Hidden Faces" (figure 7), depicts various surfaces with multifaceted figures of female figures without faces. Here, she depicts the struggle of women everywhere to find their place in a male-dominated world. Her female nudes symbolically expose society's duality and hypocrisy.

'Karo Kari Series' is one of Nahid's efforts to address social issues affecting the people of Sindh's interior (figure 8).

Observe the richness of texture in her work to get a sense of the richness of life. For the most part, she's focused on portraying women as equals in their own right. My feelings about art are intertwined with my experiences as a woman in predominantly male culture. 'As a woman's rights activist, I see women as the most potent force in the universe.'

Discussion

Although the paintings express the personal experiences of an artist but here the case is different. These artists themselves belong to rather privilege class of society but they could understand that whole social injustice and political victimisation has resulted into us suffering one part of the woman of their society. The different expression that we observe in these paintings are actually a collective narrative of the woman of society that they felt in the course of a decade under the military redeem of Zia-ul Haq. However, it should be kept in view that before they establishment of martial law there was an inherent injustice in Pakistani society due to its patriarchal nature in many of the artists were aware of that. The oppressive policies of the military establishment resulted into a more radical response. It is a matter of historical observation that whenever a movement comes into being in a society it reaches a threshold of operation and is usually a response to the suffering caused by military or dictatorial actors. In this particular sense, it can be said that showing the oppressed woman office society was an act which was directly a critique of government policies and at the same time I step in the walking deeper sensitivities in the society in order to counter that oppression. We may

say that the subject matter of these paintings shows women in general particularly under an oppressive establishment and attempts to open the eyes of other social infections that can induce a change.

The paintings are a critique of the long-held beliefs of the society that contribute to gender construction. In social and psychological studies, the creation of gender has been extensively studied and contested. The formation of male and female identity is influenced by the sense of gender. People tend to gravitate toward behaviours that are accepted in society and avoid those that are considered undesirable. A society's view of gender becomes the primary framework for a new-definition of self (Cross & Madson, 1997). Since birth, there has been almost universal segregation based on biological differences. People's behaviour toward infants drastically changes when they learn if the baby is a boy or a girl, according to research (Pattnaik, 2006). There are many different theories of gender construction, including biological determinism, that focus on the biological divide. The hypothesis asserts that all of the differences between genders are physiological (Miller & Costello, 2001). The theory asserts that gender is a universal phenomenon, regardless of caste, creed, area, or any other arbitrary factor.

The social constructionist theory of gender challenges this perspective. Based on cultural beliefs and institutions, the theory claims that gender is a social construct that evolves (Löw, 2006). According to some theories, gender is a result of social and psychological upbringing as well as language choices.

It is argued that language plays a major part in the creation of gender because gender is encoded in language (Carli, 1990). Compared to a girl, a boy's terminology tends to focus more on physical attributes like strength and agility, whereas the language used to describe a girl is more emotional. It is conceivable that a pre-existing sense of gender difference will influence the youngster as soon as he or she learns to speak. Adjectives like "girly" and "boyish" are more than just descriptive labels; they define the parameters within which an individual's identity can be expressed.

Scholars have extensively studied the role of psychological conditioning in the development of gender, and there are crucial findings that help us understand how a female's identity is built. Sigmund Freud's work is one of the most fundamental stances in psychological ideas. The idea that all people have an unconscious mind was used as a basis for claiming that gender development is influenced by an innate psychological bias (Bell, 2018). Unconscious motivation plays a significant influence in the construction of an individual's identity, even if the person is unaware of it. Freud asserted that gender is an acquired trait of human personality, not a biological one. According to psychoanalytic position, the acquisition of gender is easier for females since they acquire their mother's identity at an early age, while a male kid takes considerably longer to create a self-concept because his mother's identity is not the one to which he belongs (Galenson & Roiphe, 1980). To put it another way, this position claims that boys learn masculinity as an opposing concept to femininity, while girls do not. Because the male gender rejects qualities linked with the female gender and hence forms a superior-inferior classification, it is vital to notice.

It's widely accepted that the cultural construction of gender is a result of psychological orientation and gender roles. Psychological and ethnological techniques have been used to study psychological orientation and ethnological orientation, respectively. Findings from these approaches show that gender is reproduced and maintained in culture because of the roles associated with gender (Vogel et al., 2003). For example, women tend to be more involved in domestic work such as cooking and raising children, while men tend to be more involved in economic, administrative, and political tasks. When it comes to "doing gender," it's all about repetition and method.

Furthermore, identity control theory explains how gender roles are sustained through how people perceive their families, which then reinforces cultural norms (Carter, 2014). The stereotyped construction of one's

identity is also enforced by this kind of confirmation. This research studies how and why such identities persist and why they often do not change, even in situations where it would be desirable to alter their behaviour.

Identity theory is crucial for this study since it organises identity into sub-types, which as we have seen in Pakistani paintings, have different expressions. Since the application of these identities is not situation-dependent, they are more fundamental. These identities are more influenced by interactions and circumstances, as well as the situations in which an individual performs certain jobs. The community to which one belongs shapes one's sense of group identity; this could be based on one's religion, nationality, ideology, or any number of other factors. A sense of belonging to a group or community is fostered by one's social identities. The expression in the above paintings represent the collective suffering of women as a community in a patriarchal system.

Conclusion

One in three people on this planet is a female. Women play a greater role in the development of societies than men because of their dual roles in the production and reproduction of goods and services. All over the world, they play an important role in determining the balance of power in society. In the modern world, both men and women are involved in making all of the world's major decisions (economic, social, political, educational, and artistic), but this was not always the case. Women have been fighting for their rights throughout history, and the idea of Feminism has allowed them to be equal partners in all aspects of society. Feminism's demands for women's social and political rights were always at the top of the list. Throughout her roles in the workplace and at home, a woman proves that she is just as effective as a man.

It is in response to this disparity in general that Pakistani feminists turn to their own lives as a primary source of motivation to fight back against the conditions that have resulted in this inequity. Feminism in Pakistan is not a personal success story, but as a national movement, it lacks definition because it has no impact on the majority of the population, which comprises eighty per cent of Pakistani society. As a result of this and a general lack of education and training in art appreciation among Pakistan's population, feminist thought is not widely acknowledged on a national level. As a result, the problem lies in the minds of both the general public and the government. According to this analysis of Pakistani feminist art, it's clear that personal experience, as well as social, political, and religious influences, play major roles in creating Pakistani feminist art. Most importantly, the art works came into being in oppressive times, are revolutionary due to the force of communication they have, compelling us to negotiate our unexamined values.

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Figure 2. Salima Hashmi, Freedom, Oil on canvas, 1985.



Figure 3. Rabia Zuberi, Blind Justice, Mixed media, 1980s.



Figure 4. Laila Shahzada, Chadar aur Chardiwari II, Oil on canvas, 1980s.

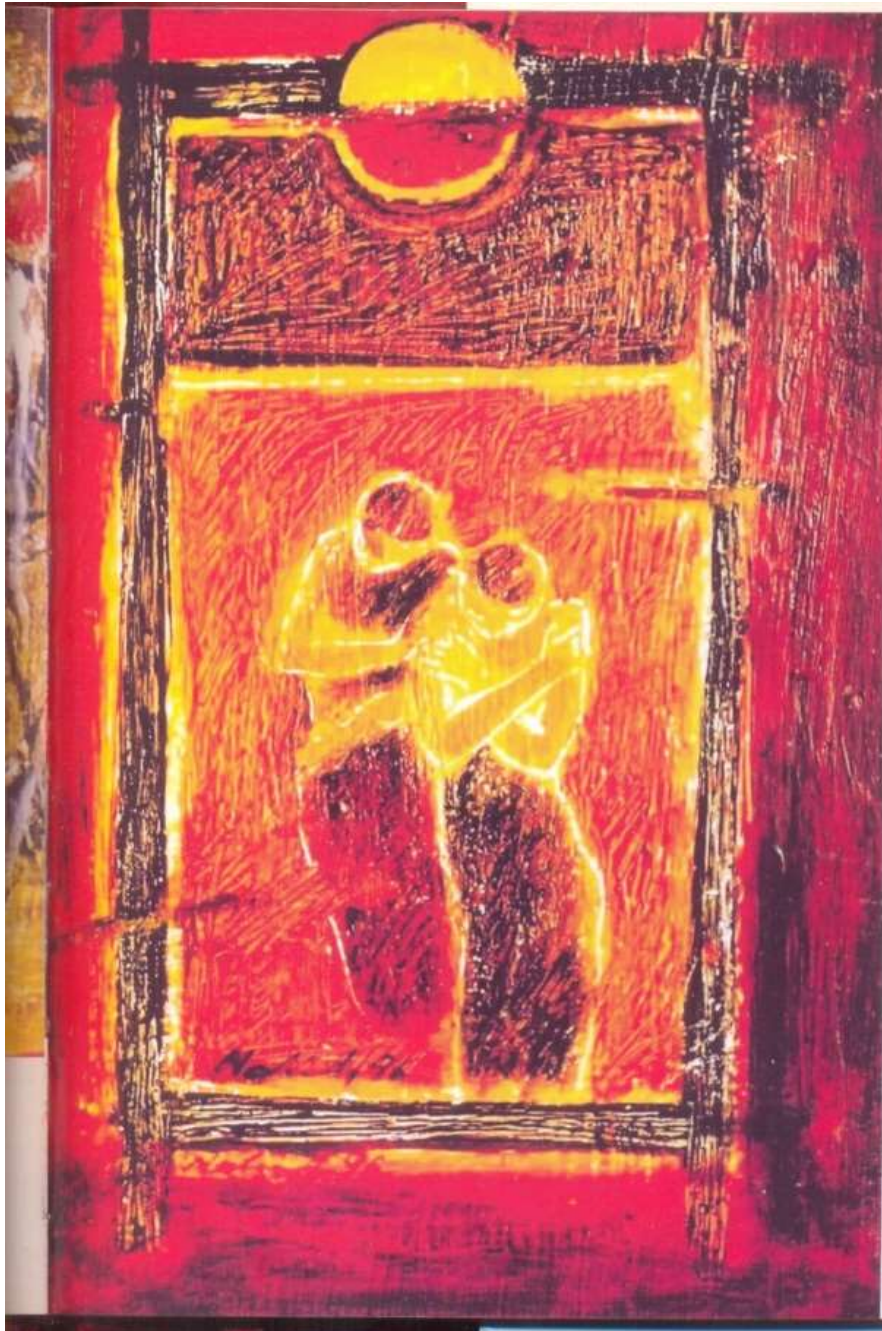


Figure 6. Nahid Raza, Shared Miseries, Acrylic on wood, 1996.



Figure 7. Nahid Reza, Hidden Faces, Acrylic on paper, 1995.



Figure 8. Nahid Reza, Karo Kari, Acrylic on paper, 1990s