

Critical Analysis of Artworks by Female Artist of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This research is about participation, growth and maturity in the area of art by Pakistani female artists. Women play an important role in influencing and enriching the society culturally and economically.

The discussion is only in context of art and Pakistani female artists to elaborate the value of women. It is an attempt to show their efforts that despite all the difficulties imposed by the society women artists are utilizing their skills and creativity in the execution of art works. Women have gained all the rights since the advent of Islam, but unfortunately these rights were not implemented due to the uncertain political and social issues.

The methodology adopted for this thesis is based on formal and contextual analysis which will help to understand the form and the hidden meaning behind it. It is also an attempt to explore some of the contextual information. The idea considering these artists was that they belong to a wide variety of styles and their experiences gained through the journey of becoming an artist.

Keywords: Pakistani Art, Nahid Raza, Feminism, Chawkandi tombs, Female painter, Bird paintings

INTRODUCTION

Art is considered to be a medium that expresses our emotions and feelings. It is a very broad term, which includes all the fields of creativity that express feelings and emotions. To communicate effectively through art one can make use of any of the art forms. The art forms include poetry, literary works, dramatics, photography, sculpture, painting etc.

Art culture of Pakistan dates back to five thousand years and it has many influences from neighboring countries. Excavations done in Mohenjo-Daro and the traces of Mughal art in miniature painting and architecture are proof that Pakistan has rich cultural and artistic heritage and it is also visible in the art works produced by the Pakistani artists. However, the contemporary art scene in Pakistan is different from the West as the artists are now experimenting different media which were not used before and this has given new dimensions to the artist's works.¹

In painting, the most favorite theme for many of the artists has been issues faced by Pakistani women. In Pakistan, woman has been seen as an icon of misery, but in some religions she is presented as a goddess. The problem in Pakistan even today is that people are gender biased.

Women have faced identity and self-respect issues all over the world. In order to resolve these issues many movements were initiated in Western society to gain women rights. For instance, one of the focuses of Communist movement has been to give confidence to women so that they can participate in social or economic activities whenever it is needed or just to be an important part of society.²

Pakistani women were having the same problems of not getting equal rights to participate in stabilizing the social and economic condition of the society. To talk about women's rights, Islam from day one has given equal rights to women and men, but unfortunately women do not know much about their rights. All these laws about voting, working, equality are politicized. Women are equally working with men since the day of independence, but did not get equal status till today. According to a famous quote by Quaid-e-Azam:

No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you; we are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are

¹Huda Ayaz, "Historical Art in Pakistan," *Artistry* (November 2013), accessed June 29th, 2015).

² Barbara Ehrenreich, "What is Socialist Feminism," *Feminist Ezine*, <http://www.feministezine.com/feminist/modern/Socialist-Feminism.html> (accessed May 14, 2013).

shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition which our women have to live.³

To make a nation grow it is not only the responsibility of men but also of women. The role played by women in the struggle for independence was important and crucial and so was in establishing art as a medium of education. Women art educators laid the foundation of Fine Arts for teaching art all over Pakistani schools, colleges and universities. At that time, many art institutes were opened and art was accepted as a means of communication and expression. During the struggling years art was merely adopted as a hobby and people did not take it seriously as a discipline to pursue their professional career. However, with the passage of time due to the efforts of some rebellious female artists Pakistani Art made its mark and general public started to realize the importance of this subject.⁴

Woman having been the primary reservoirs and transmitters of folk lore and folk art historically emerged on the national scene as important participants in the cultural landscape. The teaching helped female artists and gave them the confidence to promote art as a noteworthy activity.⁵

Pakistani Art Scenario: 1950's till to Date

Female artists in Pakistan are known as the representatives of Pakistani society. They are the ones who struggled hard in preventing male domination. In the struggle to end gender biasing and spreading the message of equality not only painters, but also writers, poets, and human rights activists were engaged. Among these women artists were not at the forefront in terms of ruling the society, but acted as a means of developing a healthy minded nation. Anna Molka Ahmed and Zubaida Agha are two big names who laid the foundation of art. Anna Molka Ahmed was the founder of Fine Arts

³ Yasser Latif Hamdani, "Feminist dimensions of the Pakistan Movement," *Pak Tribune* (August 2005), <http://paktribune.com/articles/Feminist-dimension-of-the-Pakistan-Movement-115710.html> (accessed April 30th 2013). This quote is taken from US Library of Congress report "Pakistan- A Country Study."

⁴ Yashodhara Dalmia and Salima Hashmi, *Memory, Metaphor, Mutations: the Contemporary Art of India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University, 2007).

⁵ Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan*. (Lahore: Action Aid Pakistan, 2002), 8.

Department of Punjab University now known as College of Art and Design. She had a 'hard but pragmatically rich life in which teaching, proselytizing for art, motherhood and single parenthood, as well as authorship, made her a natural proprietor of the feminine space long before it was common'. She played a key role in setting the pace of feminist art.⁶

As Anna Molka Ahmed established Fine Arts Department and started art education another artist Zubaida Agha who was a colourist and an abstractionist image maker struggled to negate the categorization of male and female artists; male as professional artists and female as teachers.⁷ With Agha's efforts Modern Art was launched in Pakistan through her exhibition in 1949 at the YMCA in Karachi.⁸

As the years passed by, along with the progress, there was a constant struggle by women to mark themselves in the history along with their male contemporaries; there were few female painters who spare no effort in turning the situation opposite by giving a new idea of social flexibility to the citizens.⁹

NAHID RAZA (B.1947)

One of the pioneering female artists' commonly known as a "feminist" is Nahid Raza (b.1947). Due to her painting style and subject matter, she was given this feminist title. This chapter explores Raza's personal life events, how she took inspiration from those events and utilized in her artworks.

Nahid Raza was born on 31st December 1947 in Delhi and was only three months old when her family shifted to Pakistan and settled in Karachi. Raza's mother was a housewife with traditional thinking though her father Syed Mohammad Raza was a learned and moderate journalist who encouraged creativity. He wrote several articles on art and edited "Artistic Pakistan" magazine for a year and a half after he got the ownership from Bashir Mirza.¹⁰

Raza was interested in drawing and painting since childhood. She got her early education was done in a small school at *Lalukhet* where

⁶ Sumera Jawad, "Remembering Anna Molka Ahmed," *Friday Times* (August 2011):26.

⁷ Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan*, 8.

⁸ Nilofur Farrukh, *Pioneering Perspective*. (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1998), 9.

⁹ Ibid, 9.

¹⁰ Akbar Naqvi, *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University, 1998), 673.

she explored creativity as well as her drawing skills. She took keen interest in all those subjects which required drawing and illustration. In her childhood she used to collect colour pencils and lead pencils from everywhere and then utilized them for her drawings. As a child she often slept with pencil shavings clenched in her hands.¹¹

When Raza was ready to sit in secondary school examination her family settled in Nazimabad. At a short distance to her house there was an art institute Mina Art School set up by Rabia and Hajra Zuberi. She wanted to join this institute but for that she had to clear her matriculation. Her parents wanted Raza to be a doctor. Upon her parents wish she took admission in intermediate, pre-medical, but after attempting several times she failed to get through and then finally was allowed to opt fine arts as her major. It is noteworthy that she was able to get admission only due to her uncle's suggestions. Both of his uncles Raza and Ali Imam supported Nahid Raza's desire to pursue Fine Arts as a major subject because they were also artists. On his return from London Ali Imam joined as Principal at Central Institute of Arts and Culture. He saw Raza's drawings and water colour paintings and appreciated the artistic talent. Upon her uncle's recommendation Raza joined Mina Art institute and graduated in 1970 from there.¹²

After graduation Raza did her first solo show and became a prominent figure in the art hub of Pakistan. From then onward she proved her mark by working and producing excellent quality work. Because of her passion to paint she turned into a threat to her male contemporaries. She started taking inspiration from her surroundings combined with feeling and passion.

Stylistically, her early canvases have a patch work quality, but they also showed the active approach of the artist. Nahid Raza did a number of shows in Karachi and Rawalpindi in 1973, 1975 and in 1978 respectively at the Indus Gallery, Karachi.

In her early artworks one can clearly see the division of surfaces. As Raza used to divide her canvas into various parts and then treated each part individually. The division of space in her canvases might have a connection to her childhood memories where there were small

rooms, restricted space and self-confinement and she was so used to depicting such manipulation of space that she seems to encapsulate it almost in every painting.

Influences

As living and growing up in the heartland of Sindh Raza was influenced by many things which were later adopted in her paintings to give meaning. It is also possible that her work was based on those influences or issues going on around her. Her first solo show was based on her inspiration from the traditional designs on fabric, especially the one called *Gaj*¹³; she had that exhibition in Goethe Institute Karachi.

Her next series of work was again based on patterns, but this time she got inspiration from huts near Lasbella Bridge. She used to go on the bridge to observe these huts which had geometric pattern, like grills from which light sheds during the day and a number of colors were visible but at night they became dark and gloomy. These grills were like the ones Mughals had in their architecture. The bright colours and on the other hand dark shadows insisted Raza to paint them as a negative and positive design space in her paintings and these art works were displayed in a group show, exhibited in 1972 at Indus Gallery. Soon after this show she got married to a fellow artist Maqsood Ali, after a year later she delivered a baby girl, Zainab.

During this time Raza was enjoying her life and everything was going smoothly. The pregnancy did not affect her work and this resulted in another solo show based on still life where yellows and reds were dominating colours. In the beginning she was interested in texture. She prepared her paintings surfaces with a thick application of zinc white on which she allowed diluted paint to drip. Before it could dry she blended the colours with the help of a palette knife and executed textured forms out of it. This was a successful show and after that Raza went to London with Maqsood to meet her artist uncle Raza.¹⁴

Shifting Focus

Settled in Paris, Haider Raza was younger brother of Nahid's father. He was the founder of Progressive Artists Group. He chose to paint in the modern idiom but continues to explore the timeless beliefs of

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan*, 86.

¹³ Gaj: a design with circular mirrors and rectilinear divisions of space with motifs embossed in cotton and silk thread.

¹⁴ Farrukh, *Pioneering Perspective*, 42.

Indian mythology. Raza was opposite of Imam, as his work was highly intuitive whereas Imam's work was based on analytical method.¹⁵

This visit helped Raza to change her perception towards art. Meanwhile she gave birth to a son Afsar. After her second child the subject matter changed and she started painting maternity moreover her work became figurative. Inspired by Matisse (figure1) her figure was elongated but the colour palette became somber as previously her artworks were in bright colours.



Figure1. Musiel (1939) by Henri Matisse.

115 x 115, 1 cm. Collection, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo

Source: Painting | <http://www.henri-matisse.net/paintings/dk.htm>

Her second pregnancy left an emotional and physical impact on her art works which was visible in her colours like dull earth tones. Though the concept of her work was strong as it was not painted before but according to critics this was stylistically lacking and that is what discouraged Raza and she moved back to the abstract expressionism. The show as per theme marked its place in art history as it was the first time that a female celebrated her womanhood and became an inspiration not only for her own self but also for others.¹⁶

In 1978 Muhammad Jamil commented on Raza's work in one of her exhibition that the abstract forms were aesthetically executed. She was known for her nonfigurative shapes done in dull tones and outlined with black. These dark tones were applied to create depth in her work. Zafar Masud also commented on the Raza's artwork "Her (Nahid's) paintings testify the artist's sincere and relentless pursuit to

communicate meaning through reason and visual stimuli".¹⁷

Divorce/ Turning Point

Early years of her marriage life were beautiful, but there was some pressure and difficulty in managing newly married life along with the work. It was something difficult for her to do, but Raza managed to overcome the problems. As the time passed by her personal life got complicated and after her second delivery she got divorced. That was a very crucial time not only for Raza but socially for other women also, as at that time the political and social situation was not good in the country. The political conditions in Pakistan during Zia UL Haq's reign put so many restrictions on women for participating in public affairs. This left them no choice to stay at home, but Raza was not ready to accept herself as a miserable woman so she continued painting and stood for the rights of other women as well. This left a positive mark on the history and persuades other women to follow this path.

Raza's decision about divorce was not taken lightly by her family, but it was the best thing she could have done for herself. She kept the kids with her and started painting more enthusiastically for their upbringing. Whatever she painted was the interpretation of her personality and exploration of herself. Due to her, self-exploration many new themes were introduced, some of them were related to her efforts, but later it became the struggle for all women and that effort won her first National Award in 1980.¹⁸

Early Work

Raza's early work was not figurative and was related to urban surroundings. As one can see through her work that she protested against the exploitation of woman, but on the other hand she also celebrated the womanhood. At first she used to depict female misery, but later she decided to paint women savoring her life.

Era of 80'S

Till 1981-82 the medium for her work was on paper heavily impasto where upon which she worked and re-worked but since 1983 she started using acrylics. After her divorce, for a short time she painted female figures as now she was more responsive of the helplessness of a woman. For this subject matter, her colour

¹⁵ Farrukh, *Pioneering Perspective*, 42-44.

¹⁶ Farrukh, *Pioneering Perspective*, 44.

¹⁷ Farrukh, *Pioneering Perspective*, 44.

¹⁸ Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan*, 89.

Critical Analysis of Artworks by Female Artist of Pakistan

palette changed and she used blue and black more as previously she was using warm tones like red, browns and pinks for texture. The female was her favourite theme as being a woman she felt their pain and joy from the depths of her heart. During the 80's era not only woman was the subject matter, but Raza also developed her interest in the delicate craftsman skills of Chawkandi tombs.

After the two successful shows this time was marked as a mature time period in her life. Both of the shows were based on strong concepts which she wanted the society to feel and think about a positive solution for those issues.

Chawkandi Series 1983

Chawkandi tombs were built during the 15th-19th century. These Balochi tombs are the best abode of Burgat, Karmati and Johkia rulers and their tribesman.¹⁹ These tombs bear different symbols which identify male and female graves. This theme inspired Raza soon after her divorce and it is a misconception that she visited them due to her tragic situation. Raza used to spend hours and hours observing the delicate carving the tombs, while her kids used to play around. According to Raza, it was not death that she contemplated, but the workmanship of the tombs which were lavishly carved artifacts. She did not show despair in painting through these tombs, instead she appreciated the craftsmanship which transformed a piece of stone into the artifact. Apart from the beauty of these tombs, one can see the gender discrimination even in death.



Figure 2. Symbols on Chawkandi Tombs

Source: Courtesy of the Artist

Multiple symbols like crown, turbans and other authoritative symbols were used in the depiction of male tombs and jewelry symbols represented female tombs (figure 2). She was against this difference, but she accepted it open heartedly

¹⁹ Farrukh, *Pioneering Perspective*, 45.

and made it prominent in her work to bring forth this subject matter. Her Chawkandi series was displayed in the Indus Gallery in 1983.

All of the series was done in dry feathery strokes with aquarelle and wax crayons on un-pigmented ground. The dominated colours in her work were stone and sand colours like rust, burnt sienna, burnt amber, yellow, cerulean blue, turquoise, orange and red. In some of the paintings she enhanced the pyramid and ziggurat form of tombs. Raza used multiple symbols throughout her work which represent various meanings.

One of her Chawkandi series paintings is "Chawkandi Tomb number 23" (figure 3). The tombs at Chawkandi were numbered and Raza painted number twenty three tomb. The image is vertically composed and instead of painting the whole tomb she took a small part of it and painted it in her own style. The symbols painted in her artwork depict several meanings of her own from the symbols painted on her artwork. Some of them are not clear because of the blurred effect and at first glance, one cannot be sure what the symbols are. Here in the center Raza has presented the tomb in a different way. It gives an impression of different things for example a door and even a balcony and it also has a dome.



Figure 3. Chawkandi

Tomb number 23 (1985) by Nahid Raza

56 x 38 cm. Acrylic on Paper. Collection, Bradford Museum and Galleries, West Yorkshire

Source: Courtesy of the Artist

A single image representing so many various meanings; dome suggesting the mosque, a platform where a girl is standing suggests balcony. In most of the artworks, Raza used to make a painted frame around the actual image.

Here she repeated her action, but not as properly as her previous artworks. The painted border is on three sides and most of the area is covered with symbols.

The dome is done with linear white line and within the dome two birds are drawn, they might be a reflection because the one bird on the right side is painted and the other is the mirror image. A white circular patch is painted under the birds with three leaves around. In the central frame under the sun or flower shape a female figure is standing in profile, her features are not clearly drawn; the only thing which makes the viewer sure about her being a girl is the skirt. Behind the girl are two horses peeping in the frame as if they are behind some wall and entering into a room. This central frame is giving a balcony effect where a platform is painted on which the girl is standing. The composition is cut from where the horses enter and it is giving an impression of a pillar on which symbols are painted but hardly visible because of the overall impact of blur treatment.

Raza's colour palette is restricted to fewer colours, but she creates tonal variations from it. In this art work reds and blues are used but to some areas where these colours mix purple tone is created but the intensity is kept light. The overall impact of this painting is dark because of the theme and also because of the dark colour palette, but a tinge of blue makes it bright and addition of white might be to give it a soothing effect. As all know that Chawkandi tombs bear gender discriminated symbols, but here Raza instead of making these symbols prominent combined them together. She incorporated female and horse showing that both are incomplete without each other. Raza represents them like an eternal bond of male and female in the world, but painting it on a tomb and a dome on top of it is like connection to Allah, one has to return to him in its purest form and marriage also is a pure form of relation which gives equal respect to male and female in the society and ties them in a bond which has to be completed by both parties.

In 1985 Raza visited the States and joined a print making class at Wayne State University, U.S.A. it was a short time course in which she knew that she will be only able to learn the basics of this technique. The best thing that happened to Raza during her class was the discovery of "woman icon". She was drawing a woman copper plate when she was seized by an urge to cross her head with two parallel lines

and put the heads of her children upright as well as upside down within the lines. Her instructor saw the drawing and was highly inspired, Raza also showed him her Chawkandi drawings and then the instructor arranged a show in city's art gallery. Though it was something good for Raza's career, but she was not satisfied. She thought that she did not belong to Detroit this was because whatever she has inside about women and their feelings, the American culture was totally beyond it and this did not affect her awareness of female issues.²⁰

According to Raza's statement "Women are the survivors, givers of life and hope for the future."²¹

Her statement clearly indicates that women are victors rather than victims. It was her way of motivating women, giving them a positive energy, showing them that if she can work and move on in her life after all the mishaps others can also do that. This is a notable thing which leaves a constructive mark on one's life.

Women Series

Nahid Raza's woman series was based on nude female figures. She was highly inspired by the Mohenjo-Daro dancer, by the poetry of Fehmida Riaz, some Eastern and Western artists like Georgia O'Keefe, Farida Kahlo, Arpita Singh, Anjolie Ela Menon, Anne Sexton and many others. One of Anne Sexton's verses was Raza's favorite.

I have looked around, as I don't believe in working in a dark room by myself. That kind of isolation could turn one blind. But I have always tried to articulate my own thoughts, evolve my own symbols, and express myself in my own style. My woman has gone through divorce and motherhood, but everything is beautiful about her. Of course the most beautiful is the woman's Golden Age (the 50s) and then her Silver Age (60s onwards).²²

These verses clearly portray Raza's life. She was the woman who got divorced, went through all the difficult situations but did not stop

²⁰ Naqvi, *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan*, 669.

²¹ Nahid Raza, "http://www.pakrisingcharityart.co.uk/nahid-raza/" (accessed on May 29th, 2013).

²² Nahid Raza – the Feminist Painter - Nurturing the Woman within," *Karachi wali* (July 21), <http://karachiwali.blogspot.com/2010/07/nahid-raza-feminist-painter-nurturing.html> (accessed June 1st, 2013).

working. Instead of being confined in her studio she became the voice of other women in her life. Raza used different symbols and created her own style of work to express emotions which could seem more real and close to life. Though she has gone through divorce and upbringing of the kids still she managed to smile and coup-up with the grim circumstances.

Riaz's poetry represents the voice of women as a free spirit who have limitations but she also has the strength to stand firm in front of those who let her down. Woman plays multiple parts in her life, discussed by Raza as she observes her from different angles and for every aspect she used a symbol to signify her.

After her "Dancer series" held at Chawkandi Art in 1987 she was asked that why she painted nude? She answered that this is her true profile because this is how she is seen by man even when dressed. One has to be a woman to appreciate the pain of the male gaze- to be a body and no more!²³

Raza was against this point of view that why it happens only with a woman. After observing the different aspects she concluded that our society want girls to play their part perfectly in every role, she must be a perfect daughter, sister, wife and mother, but on the other hand a boy also has the same relations but he is not judged on those levels and conditions. Why? Another issue is prevailing in our society that why a woman is just a "sex" symbol even though she is working equally with men in every part of life, helping them but still no respect is given. For how long this gender discrimination will prevail in our society. A question asked from generations and still unanswered.

In 1988 Raza witnessed a shameful event which compels her to paint the issue and bring it into light. In Nawabpur a mother and sister of a young man were paraded stark naked through the streets of town because that man loved the girl above his social status and she loved him in return.

Visits TO Hira Mandi 1990

In 1990 Raza visited Hira Mandi along with the director Dr. Bernard Scherer of Goethe Institute, Karachi, Meher Afroz, Lalarukh, Saba Hussain, Nagori and Anwar Saeed. The reason to visit

this place was a workshop on violence. It was a bold adventure done by Raza but she used it as a metaphor. The group spent two hours listening to *kotha* songs and dance performance and also spoke to the *houris* of the night. What Raza observed with eyes of an artist was Hira Mandi's chiaroscuro on the streets and the *kotha* itself, the smallness of rooms as well as the *jharoka* from which young girls hung over the narrow lanes and disappeared into the darkness of smaller cells for business. There was a mystery which was accentuated by sounds of *ghonghar* song and laughter from behind doors. Hira Mandi was one large labyrinth a matrix and an entrapment. What made Raza sad was the spectacle of girls and woman sitting in line to be chosen for a few hours of pleasure not theirs but of the customer. Raza herself was a motivation to women but here she found the prostitute as true victim, she is guiltless.

She did numerous paintings on *kotha* after this visit. She painted cell like rooms with female faces painted in tiles all over the surface. In 1995 she painted headless women as pawns on the chessboard. The chess motif appeared in the 1996 painting and she showed a woman in a room within a rectangle. Her face of that of an anthropoid and she was lasciviously exposed. This painting was a *gali* a term for domestic sex abuse, hurled at voyeurisms. A shadowy figure was seen against a small open window. The pleasures associated with the prostitute's accomplishments like music, dance, repartee and poetry were eliminated from the paintings. Instead it suggested a state of schizophrenia, in stripping her of beauty and romance. Raza made these women like pre-historic mother goddess who was both sacred and obscene.²⁴

Work Analysis

Raza was one of those artists who stood for women rights even in the hardest political turmoil. She is known to be a feminist painter who began her career in early 1970's, a time when her fellow artists were using cubism as a step to enter in the art field as well as many of them were doing non-figurative work. She has made tremendous efforts throughout her life in supporting female and fighting for their issues through her work. She is an inspiration to all the young artists who have a will to work for a cause. Whatever Raza painted was her first hand

²³ Naqvi, *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan*, 669.

²⁴ Naqvi, *Image and Identity: Fifty Years of Painting and Sculpture in Pakistan*, 674-675.

experience. She depicted the woman who wishes to be equally respected in the society instead of being left out (figure 4). This painting is titled as "Alone". It is a vertical composition where the actual image is enclosed within a painted border. At first Raza used to outline her figures with black, but here one can see that she applied it on bigger surfaces making it an important part of the painting. As the title suggests it is a representation of an alone woman, but according to the colours it has some positive meaning in it also.



Figure 4. *Alone* (2013) by Nahid Raza.

24 x 36 inches. Mix Media on Canvas. Collection, Artist's Collection

Source: *Courtesy of the Artist*

Overall the colour palette consists of dull and sober tones doing complete justice to the theme. Raza used to paint figures giving them a sketch effect and here she painted the portrait in the same manner. Though the colours in overall composition does not show that women are victims or they are the symbol of gloom. Instead it shows the reality that this happens with women and one should stop, they are a part of society and should be treated well, giving equal chances to work and be respected by the society. Most of the women work but unfortunately they do not get equal status and are not even acknowledged for their skills. Because of all these circumstances she confines herself into her own world and did not allow anyone to enter which makes her more miserable.

After discussing Raza's work one can say that this was something which she also felt when got divorced. During that time she wanted the support from her family and near ones but due to the society's fake principles nobody was there to stand by her side. These were the emotions which made her paint women theme because all the ideas were her first hand experiences. She could feel the pain of the women all around her.

Raza's works do not have much colour variety; she used only three tones to create light and dark shades. Colours applied have some meaning which incorporated with the theme. The black she applied on the border means hidden, insecurity and seclusion. It has an absorbing quality and it shows that all the happiness is blocked from outside or if someone has sucked it from her. Black also has some positive meanings but in this artwork the composition and treatment did not allow viewer to feel happy or positive instead it asks you to feel the misery and support her. As the eye enters the main frame, golden colour is applied in the background in contrast to the black applied outside to create a frame. At the top of this inner rectangular piece one can see thin strips of brown and gold colour applied alternatively, breaking the monotony of the composition. Gold is generally associated with male power and strength and also being a warm colour it explains the nature of woman which is kind, compassionate and giving. It is applied in the background and suggests that a woman has strength like male, she can handle the difficult situations but on the other hand she is ready to spread love and will never let go of her warm nature. The focal point is the portrait composed on the right hand side of the canvas. Painted in brown tone giving it a blur feeling with no detailed work on the features rather the eyes are closed suggesting a negative thing that the women who is rejected by the society has now closed her eyes towards the people. In Raza's paintings she used to prepare the base first with texture and this also can be seen in the inner rectangular piece.

According to Raza, motherhood was the base of feminine rights but it was different from Western concept. As per her thoughts one should look into one's own culture to find out the solutions of problems instead of looking for outer help. Whatever she painted shows the bitter side of society.

Though she was motivated by many artists, but she never copied them and created her own style. In simple words her work can be called semi abstract. If we see her paintings, the figures are not drawn with detailed features instead they give sketched feeling. Some of them are painted with palette knife and in someone can see the surface because of the thin washes of paint.

Her style of work can be called impressionistic or even expressionistic also. Raza's colour palette changed according to her mood and is

quite mixed as one can see a variety of hues. There was a time when her colours became darker and she started using black, somber browns and blues in her artworks. All these techniques were used intentionally to express her emotions. She painted nudes in open space in 1995 where she minimized the architectural details and trees and put complete focus on the female. Her artworks were a complete depiction of herself, her exploration, growth and maturity.

Many Egyptian and Indian symbols were utilized in her artwork because their study or representation gives her satisfaction in expressing the need. Raza's introduction with different mediums and technique like print making and acrylics broadens up her vision and gives new direction to her artwork. She also used geometric shapes as symbols like she did a Kaa'ba series after returning from Umrah in 2012. The square shape of Kaa'ba inspired her a lot but after her return, she got herself involved in other projects, but somehow back in her mind this shape was stuck and finally she planned to portray it on her canvases. Square for Raza was a symbol of peace and spirituality as associated with Kaa'ba. She presented it as a power of womanhood. One can say that this was a mixed media series because she used lace, embroidery and collage motifs.²⁵

One of the purest series, which is truly a representation of Raza inner self was her women series which referred to her experience as well as the socio political circumstances. The titles of these series were "Biography of a Woman" "Woman for Sale" "Divorce" "The Letter" "A reply".²⁶ According to Raza only a woman can feel the pain of a woman and no one can depict her miseries or happiness in the purest form. As for male, woman is just a body and object. Raza's woman is a mixture of betrayal, affection, loyalty, sensuality, thus a woman is everything for Raza, a complete being. She explores and examines not only her own but others inner feelings in our rapidly changing world. Other paintings "A Door in My Heart" and "Pages of My Diary" also indicate that there are issues of concern relating to women which get ignored or are out of sight. Women conceal their feelings layer by layer like Raza's paintings having textures, layers and colours revealing and concealing at the same time each

other thus portraying the hidden and open realities of a woman's life.²⁷

One of her paintings in the Women Series was titled as "Feelings" where she used texture and colours to portray different emotions and feelings which a woman cannot express due to society's fear. This series was done in dull, sober tones because of the concept.

One of Raza's paintings from Women Series titled as "Life Around Me" (figure 5) is a story about her life as the name suggests. The whole picture is composed into small rectangular and square boxes, each containing different symbols depicting its own story. Colours that are used are quite subdued. Oranges, magenta, blues, and whites. Thick strokes are applied with little merging. On the top of the painting she painted a circle with divisions of black and white, a symbol particularly used for men and women, known as yin and yang.



Figure 5. *Life Around Me* (2009) by Nahid Raza. 2.5 x 3 ft. Acrylic on Canvas. Collection, Artist's Collection

Source: *Courtesy of the Artist*

Other symbols used in this painting are fish, flowers, dove, feet and women face. These symbols can also lead our mind towards religion as feet painted on the left corner of canvas belong to Buddhism so as a hand and a palm facing outwards also belong to Buddhism and is a symbol of Shia sect. Bird's specially resting and flying dove are used mostly in her paintings which show as bounded in something (if resting) and free also (if shown flying). All the symbols used have one common meaning which is "Peace". One can interpret that this is a story of peace which according to the artist should be

²⁵ Artist's statement about her work.

²⁶ Nahid Raza – the Feminist Painter - Nurturing the Woman within," *Karachiwali* (July 21), <http://karachiwali.blogspot.com/2010/07/nahid-raza-feminist-painter-nurturing.html> (accessed June 1st, 2013).

²⁷ Nadeem Zuberi, "Intrinsic feelings of Women," *Weekly Pulse* (May 2013), <http://weeklypulse.org/details.aspx?contentID=3617&storylist=3> (accessed May 11th, 2013).

present in every man and woman's life, as was missing from her own.

Though this painting is composed on a single picture plan and there is no three dimensional quality in it but due to its colours it creates a vibrant impact on viewer. There is one more prominent thing in Raza's artwork that most of her elements were outlined in black but handled so artistically that they do not give a static look.

Raza's colour palette never remained same. There is a huge variety in colour range as in some of her artworks one can see mid tones and in some very sharp and vibrant colours.

Another of Raza's artwork titled "A Cloud" (figure 6) as compared to the previous image is painted in monotonous tones. It is a single figure composition arranged in a square to give an impact of window. The woman is shown in frontal face, eyes closed but the body is sideways, holding a bird and white flower in her right hand and a cloud above her head. The colours used here are flat and are not vibrant in fact they are dull with a limited palette. Resting Birds used in Raza's paintings represent restriction but white dove is also a symbol of peace even the white flower which woman is holding. The whole work comprises of symbols which when combined together explain the real meaning of this art piece.



Figure7. *A Cloud* by Nahid Raza. 2 x 1.5 ft. Acrylic on Board.

Source:http://images.arcadja.com/raza_naheeda_clood~OMfb0300~10444_20123_2012-05-23_516.jpg

Woman is shown in this art work with eyes closed and expressionless face. The whole atmosphere is created to depict bounding life of women. Colours used are also dull, going exactly with the theme. The white being used is of muddy quality. Though white is a colour of peace but used here with brown shades gives it a dull effect. Cloud above the female head acts opposite from other symbols used. It is generally a symbol of protection acting as a guard on woman. Though she is bounded but still is safe under the cloud symbolizing that supreme power which always takes care of us. A very simple composition but with a very strong meaning that nobody should ever be afraid of any responsibility or any kind of burden in life because there is one ultimate power who is always there to support us, give us strength. Raza's paintings leave an effective message on every person's life especially on women whom she wanted to be strong in every walk of life.

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