

Rickshaw Decoration in Pakistan

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Abstract. In Pakistan's contemporary visual culture, vehicular art plays a prominent role. The present article investigates the decoration of motor or auto-rickshaws respectively Vespa scooters, an underresearched topic in comparison to the much better studied truck art. Based on fieldwork and photographic documentation, the author differentiates the local decorative styles of the cities of Peshawar, Lahore, Karachi, and Sukkur, while paying particular attention to inscriptions. In general, decoration shows a tendency from figural motifs towards vernacular calligraphy over the last three to four decades.

[vehicular art, folk art, picture panels, film pictures, inscriptions]

Looking into the topic of vehicular art in Pakistan, an abundant field of research in terms of decoration and symbolism of motifs, it comes as a surprise that hardly anything has been studied apart from the well-explored and highly celebrated "truck art". Attention to the latter by scholars as well as the lay public fascinated by its exotic colourfulness seems to have almost veiled the existence of other forms of "art on wheels" similarly eye-catching from an aesthetic point of view and equally rooted in folk culture. Additionally to purely visual aspects of decoration, also semiotic values need to be taken into account. Thus, Jamal Elias, a renowned scholar of religious studies and material culture who wrote a seminal work on Pakistani truck art, rightfully criticizes that what is lacking thus far "[...] is a recognition of vehicular art as a legitimate form of cultural expression and its status as a scopic or visual regime unto itself in addition to being an expression of a wider visual regime of the culture to which it belongs" (Elias 2011: 9).

Pakistan's rich vehicular culture contains more than the well-known trucks, trailers, tankers, buses and minibuses with their extraordinary indigenous aesthetics, meaningful motifs, important societal functions and cultural messages. There are other types of richly decorated vehicles as well, such as small Suzuki buses or share taxis, four- or six-wheeled wedding chariots (Frembgen 2003), three-wheeled motorised rickshaws or auto-rickshaws, three-wheeled Qingshi¹ motorcycle-rickshaws with two benches for passengers, two-wheeled horse-drawn carriages, two-wheeled donkey carts, bicycles as well as vendors' push carts. Some of them will be described and analysed in future in short contributions based on observations made in the context of other research-projects, hence without any claim for a thorough systematic and comprehensive treatment of the topics in question. These ethnographic notes deal with "vernacular"² artistic forms of expression, namely with street graphics. In the field of contemporary visual representations some forms of expression do have more a touch of the "popular" (vs. "elite") or the "local" (vs. "global"), whereas others can be more aptly characterized as "folk art" (vs. "official", "high" or "elite"). Without entering further into a debate about such conventional descriptive categories and related ideas, which refer to contextually based quotidian visual representations,³ I want to quote the folklorist Henry Glassie's still useful definition of "folk art":

Thinking of folklore as a kind of action (artistic communication in small groups) and art as a kind of action (the synthesis of materialization and conceptualization), the contemporary folklorist might define folk art as the unification of the individual and the collective through a communication that enlivens the feelings while urging the mind toward truth (Glassie 1989: 88).

- 1 Name of the company running this type of rickshaw
- 2 For an insightful discussion of the terms "vernacular", "popular", and "folk" as far as religion is concerned, see Elias (2011: 15–16). Elias writes, for instance: "The notion of a *vernacular* avoids the romantic evocation of a primordiality or prater-authenticity that inhabits words such as *tradition*, *native*, or *local*; instead, it allows for the hybridization and heterogeneity that is essential to modern existence even among those referred to as "the masses?" in works on South Asia" (2011: 15). In addition to "vernacular", in the field of arts and crafts we also use notions such as "popular" (made for the masses) or "folk" (not made for the elite).
- 3 For a discussion of terminology and classification with respect to the Muslim world, see also Frembgen 2021: 136–137.

Folk art, in general, is produced for the “folk”, for people with subaltern social status, and understood by everybody (Williams 2003: 199, 201). It has an aesthetic dimension and is shaped by tradition, imagination and the love to experiment.

Rickshaws in Pakistan

The focus of the present paper is on motorcycle-rickshaws, auto-rickshaws, Vespa scooters and Tuktuks, simply called *riksha* in modern-day Pakistan, an ubiquitous vehicle used as a cheap hired taxi above all in cities and to some extent also in rural areas (Fig. 1). Today, there is hardly any bicycle-rickshaw in service; the last ones were plying the roads of the city of Bahawalpur in South Punjab years ago. Bicycle-rickshaws, still common in India, were so-to-speak the successors of the rickshaws with two handles pulled by a man which were outlawed in Pakistan by the government in 1949. Pulled rickshaws were introduced primarily in the nineteenth century by the British to the colonial hill-stations from Japan. They were first called *jenny-rickshaw* or *jinrickshaw*, a corrupted form of the Japanese *jin-riki-sha* (man – strength – vehicle), a term later abbreviated into the Anglo-Indian ricksha(w) (Lewis 1991: 136, 202).

Manufactured since the late 1940s in Italy by the Piaggio company, Vespa scooters were manufactured in India in collaboration with Raja Group of Industries. Most probably they were first introduced to major cities in Pakistan in the late 1950s. In this regard a historic photograph was found on the Internet showing in 1960 an undecorated rickshaw whereby the scooter in front was not yet converted into a cabin. Friends told me that in Lahore in the mid-1960s rickshaws had already been quite common. They had two rear wheels and a flatbed on top of the rear axle. At present, in addition to Piaggio, also local companies like New Asia, Sazgar as well as the Japanese company Honda manufacture rickshaws mainly in Lahore now as four-stroke rickshaws. They run mostly on CNG (compressed natural gas) or on petrol, recently also few environment-friendly electric rickshaws have been introduced. Rickshaws have a seating capacity of two to three passengers on the bench in the rear cabin, but depending on the age and body size of passengers this number is often considerably increased as also the footrest can be used as a tiny bench for sitting. Metal bars divide the passenger’s cabin from the driver’s bench in the front. In cold and rainy weather the rear cabin can be closed on each side by a flap-door. Generally, the rickshaw belongs to a wealthy owner or a company running a small fleet and employing a number of drivers, but at times the driver is also the owner. In this case a rickshaw often shows the latter’s individual taste in decoration. An expensively decorated vehicle is at times equipped with its own sound system including a LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) screen.

Unfortunately, my study of Pakistani rickshaws is uneven in so far as I am only able to refer briefly to the practice of decoration in Peshawar, Lahore and Karachi whereas my data on the respective craft in the town of Sukkur in upper Sindh (the southernmost province of Pakistan) are better grounded through my own fieldwork and photographic documentation. This is mainly because rickshaw decoration, like other artistic expressions of the vernacular, has undergone tremendous change over the last decades showing much less variety in design than before. Thus, unlike in the case of trucks, ornate rickshaw decoration is not pervasive throughout Pakistan and nowadays often reduced to fix a few stickers with Islamic inscriptions either on the windscreen or inside the cabin on the dashboard, a number of fancifully decorated mirrors, tassels, and pieces of cloth against the “evil eye” on the chassis outside or using the back of the rickshaw for political slogans, religious announcements and commercial advertisements. Nowadays, one also often sees “plain” rickshaws without any decoration. As my initial scholarly interest had been focused on painting and inscriptions, I am not in a position to offer anything



Fig. 1 Rickshaw in Karachi calligraphed with invocations to the Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (J.W. Frembgen; July 2011)

exhaustive in this particular field of visual culture. Therefore, in what follows, only a short survey about distinctive localized styles will be presented.

Rickshaw Decoration in Peshawar

The most lavishly decorated rickshaws I saw on the roads of Peshawar in the early 1980s, that is to say in the Pashtun/Pakhtun dominated province of Northwest Pakistan nowadays named Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Frembgen 2016: 24). In those days, the rickshaw's body (*bādī*) consisted of a wooden frame ornately covered on the back and above the wheels with silver shining hammered steel sheets worked in *poussée-repoussée* technique⁴ or remained plain to be used as space for a painting executed later. There was a low coach-door for the passenger's cabin with woodcarving following the regional Peshawari style of truck decoration. The designs mainly consisted of floral patterns. Likewise the cabin interior was extensively decorated with reflective tape, stickers, coloured garlands, artificial flowers, talismanic pendants and objects with Islamic symbolism. Often the driver could hardly peep out from his window. The hood-like roof as well as the upper backside of the cabin were as usual covered with monochrome oilcloth so that the lower part of the chassis backside remained as a space for a painting. This space between the tail-lights is henceforth simply called "picture panel". In 1980, the Austrian Ethnologist Karl Wutt took photographs of two scenes amazing in aesthetics and content: a mungo killing a snake (Fig. 2) and the finger gesture of keeping an erotic secret for oneself indicated by red-painted lips and a right hand with bangles.

A rickshaw I saw in July 1983 in Rawalpindi (Punjab) identified itself by the inscription *Mohmand Ikspres* (Express) as belonging to a Pashtun from the Mohmand tribe. Also in its decoration this vehicle showed the regional Peshawari style of rickshaw decoration with the depiction of a grey partridge (*chukōr*). Jamal Elias comments about

⁴ Technique of chiselling by which the material is turned twice.



Fig. 2 Snake-killing mungo on the picture panel of a rickshaw in Peshawar (K. Wutt; 1980)



Fig. 3 Bloodstained fighter with a Kalashnikov; picture panel of a rickshaw in Peshawar (J.W. Frembgen; February 2006)

this iconic motif often also found on trucks: The chukor partridge is commonly kept as a pet in Pakistan and Afghanistan because of a belief that it functions as a supernatural miner's canary⁵: if anyone casts the evil eye on a household or individual, the spell is deflected onto the bird which then dies. The death of the bird serves as a warning to its owner to take immediate preventive measures to avert misfortune. Visual representations of the chukor partridge, therefore, possess a clear prophylactic purpose, guarding the truck, its cargo and those associated with it against the evil eye (Elias 2011: 156, 159).

⁵ The expression "miner's canary" refers to a caged bird, for instance a canary, which a miner takes along with him into the mine as a sort of warning system because its death provides a warning of dangerous levels of toxic gases.



Fig. 4 Drunkard with bottles of alcohol; picture panel of a rickshaw in Peshawar (J.W. Frembgen; February 2006)

One early evening in February 2006, during the time of the Iraq war (2003–2011) and the beginning of the US/NATO attacks on the Taliban in regions close to the Afghan border when the city of Peshawar was in a volatile political situation with rampant violence, I had the chance to take photographs from paintings on the back of rickshaws. Some images reflect the glorification of *jihādi* culture prevalent in those days, for instance in the motif of crossed Kalashnikovs. Other hand-painted images on the “picture panel” show crude portraits of fiery bearded Macho type gun-toting heroes (Fig. 3). Heroes also figure prominently on rickshaws in the city of Herat in West Afghanistan (Baumhauer 2020: 345–352). In Pakistan they appear in *deshm desh* films, a key thematic film genre since the 1950s focusing on aggression and glorifying weapons. In a film picture showing a drunkard with bottles of alcohol his eyes as well as other parts of the image were erased as morally objectionable depictions (Fig. 4). In Peshawar film posters with images of masculinity and seductive women are usually taken as models not only for large-scale cinema billboards, but also for small-scale paintings on rickshaws. Images of women could still be seen in 2002 also in the neighbouring city of Jalalabad in East Afghanistan (Wutt 2010: 93), but were hardly portrayed later on as they were condemned because of their allegedly “un-Islamic” moral aura (Fig. 5). As Muhammad Riaz Khan writes in a letter (dated 22 April 2020), “[...] until the late 1980s, the owners of cinema halls reached out to the artists decorating rickshaws to paint people’s favourite movie stars in order to promote films and, of course, the artists were paid for that”.

As far as recent changes in rickshaw decoration is concerned, my friend Riaz Khan emphasizes that the manufacture of these vehicles changed over the last twenty to thirty



Fig. 5 Heroine from a Pashto melodrama; picture panel of a rickshaw in Jalalabad/East Afghanistan (K. Wutt)



Fig. 6 Armed hero from a Pashto movie depicted on a rickshaw in Peshawar (Muhammad Riaz Khan; April 2020)

years insofar as the wooden frame was substituted by a metal chassis whereby a special block was reserved for the number plate exactly at the site of the previous “picture panel”. Because of this lack of space and also because of the cheaper modern digital technology which has thoroughly affected graphic design, old rickshaw painters did not find apprentices any more. Riaz Khan came to know of one last senior artist by the name of Hafiz Shahid who runs a shop in old Peshawar as well as two artists in Faqirabad near Peshawar who write poetry on vehicles. He was also able to take a picture from an old rickshaw made in 1990, still hand-painted with a scene from a movie (Fig. 6). Such rickshaws are officially no more allowed to be on the road but are illegally used in rural areas close to the city. Subsequently, he photographed some more rickshaws painted with scenes from popular movies and added that as they are illegally on the roads the police either confiscates them or fines the driver with 5000 Rupees (about 27 Euros) for violation of the law.

Recently, Riaz Khan photographed a rickshaw with the following wise saying written on its back:

Tīr shu teryagi daurān da dai duniyā.

“Time in past and present and the duration of this world passes by and will continue to do so.”

Pāti bah nah shi bādshahgan da dai duniyā.

“All the kings will also vanish from this world.”

Gharib Gul satre mashe.

(greeting by the driver or owner to a friend named Gharib Gul)

Otherwise, drivers often proudly write their personal name or their sons’ names on their vehicle.

Rickshaw Decoration in Lahore

At least over the period of the last twenty years I did not see film pictures painted on rickshaws in the biggest city of the Punjab although it is also the centre of the Pakistani film industry. In Lahore in comparison to Peshawar rather different techniques are used for decoration. Thus, craftsmen in the workshops on Lytton Road beautify the rickshaws’ “picture panel” with colourful naturalist paintings, for instance an idyllic landscape with mountains, a lake and a deer in the foreground (Fig. 7) or a warship further decorated with the motifs of crossed sabres, tiger’s head and a flying eagle (Fig. 9). Hammered metalwork is done in combination with inscriptions, for example in the case of a vertical panel with the name *Shahbāz Qalandar* invoking Pakistan’s most popular Sufi saint and the depiction of a peacock below, both motifs accentuated by colour and an additional red rose. Also the name of the owner can be embossed on a silver shining metal board which will be fixed on the back of the vehicle (Fig. 8).

The craftsmen on Lytton Road often cooperate with specialists who, after consulting the vehicle’s owner, protect the rickshaw inside and/or outside with “vernacular calligraphy” (Fig. 10), especially the Islamic creed and invocations of God, such as *Allāh-o-akbar* (God is the greatest) and *yeh sab tumhārā karam hai āqā ke bāt abtak banī hui hai* (“This is only because of your beneficence, Lord (Master), that everything is going smoothly”) as well as the well-known invocations to God *yā hayy* (Oh, Living one) and *yā qayyūm* (Oh, Eternal one). Other pious sayings praise the Prophet as well as Sufi saints. Lal Shahbaz Qalandar’s (d. 1274 CE) calligraphed nickname *Jhūle La’l* (“the Red One, who rocks himself – like a child in the cradle”) has an iconic value within visual piety and is virtually omnipresent in Pakistan, particularly in Lahore



Fig. 7 Rickshaw in Lahore with *Jhūle La'l*, the nickname of a famous Sufi saint, written on the back and a romanticized landscape depicted below (J.W. Frembgen; December 2006)



Fig. 8 Craftsman in Lahore working on an inscription (J.W. Frembgen; December 2006)



Fig. 9 Warship; picture panel of a rickshaw in Lahore (J.W. Frembgen; December 2006)

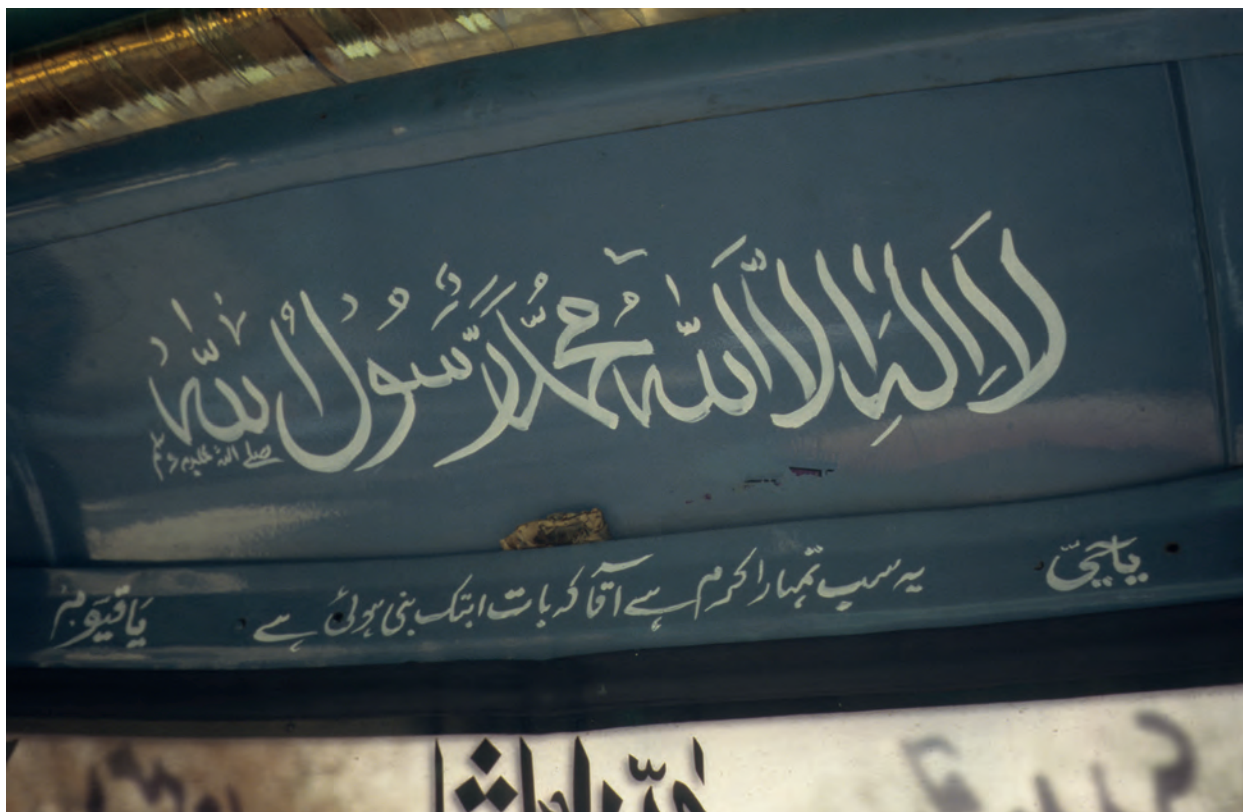


Fig. 10 Islamic inscriptions in the driver's cabin; rickshaw in Lahore (J.W. Frembgen; February 2006)

(Frembgen 2020: Fig. 46-48). Apart from explicit religious epigraphy, also nicknames, humorous quips, witty sayings, proverbs and warnings are written on the back of rickshaws. Thus, I once read the following somewhat sarcastic dictum:

Māñ dī bad du'ā: jā putr rikshā hī chalā.

"The curse of a mother: Go and drive a rickshaw, son!"

In addition, often the name of the company running a fleet is found on the back, such as *Qādrī Atūz* (autos), *Khwājā Atūz* or *Jawād Atūz*.

Close to the workshops sticker artists offer their services and further embellish the rickshaw following the wishes of the vehicle's owner and/or the driver. Besides standard calligraphic tableaux and figural motifs (such as a Muslim in prayer or a butterfly) the depiction of Sufi saints plays a prominent role; often such stickers are handmade whereby the client can choose particular colours and shapes for the saint's appearance (Frembgen 2018/19 a). Something surprisingly unusual and delightful I only saw twice or thrice in Lahore and not elsewhere were handwritten poems on the inside of the flapdoors. It turned out that the driver himself had composed these poems.

What can be observed in Lahore and other cities of the Punjab at least over the last decade is that more and more placards are pasted on the oilcloth at the back of the vehicle. The latter is thus turned into a moving advertising medium, either for commercial products, for services or to announce events (Fig. 11). We find, for instance, placards providing information about the *'urs* (lit. wedding, meaning the mystical nuptial union of the saint's soul with God) of Sufi saints, preliminary rituals taking place in Lahore before starting the pilgrimage to the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan Sharif



Fig. 11 Placard announcing a preliminary celebration for Pakistan's most popular Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar; rickshaw in Lahore (J.W. Frembgen; December 2013)

(Sindh), gatherings to celebrate the birth anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad as well as other religious gatherings (Frembgen 2018/19 b).

Rickshaw Decoration in Karachi

In terms of decorative styles rickshaws in the megacity of Karachi show a mix of elements with no exceptional or particular remarkable features, similarly to the trucks embellished there it appears as “an amalgam of several sub-variants” (Elias 2011: 104). Painting is not worth to be mentioned, at best here and there a tiny picture panel appears, for instance on mud guards and rear bumpers (Oppen 1992: 85, 87). What can be observed at least over the last three decades in the workshops in Patel Para and Ranchore Lines, where the craftsmen are mostly Pashtuns (Pathan), is a taste for ornamental applications. Multi-coloured floral or geometric motifs and mosaic compositions are cut out from oilcloth or plastic foil and applied to the side panels of the hood-like roof as well as on the back. The stylized shape of a butterfly may adorn the front or more often the back part of the hood. Unlike in Peshawar and Lahore, in Karachi the lower part of the chassis' back is also covered with oilcloth and often shows the shape of a triangle (Oppen 1992: 86–87; Lari 2012: 248, photo taken in the 1970s). Glittering reflective tapes cut into patterns further beautify parts of the chassis' outside. In addition, one comes across rickshaws with elaborate chrome work consisting of embossed designs around the windshield in the front, a decorative element obviously inspired by Bedford trucks (Frembgen 2018/19a: 86). Stickers and handwritten inscriptions are either sparsely or extensively used depending on the preference of the driver respectively the vehicle's owner.

Calligraphy as an element of official Islamic art also entered the urban folk art of rickshaw decoration. Inscriptions, for instance of the names of Sufi saints, can cover the whole rickshaw (cf. Fig. 1) or prominently be placed on the back (Frembgen 2020: Fig. 46–48). Besides there are sayings from the Quran, pious religious formulas and exhortations to say one's prayers as well as appeals to proselytise in the context of fundamentalist Islamic movements. Other inscriptions, such as those collected by S.M. Shahid, a leading Pakistani musicologist, are humorous quips and witty sayings in Urdu. They were inscribed on rickshaws Shahid saw in Karachi; I quote a few examples (Shahid 1999: 10, 16, 18–19, 30) and add the English translations:

Musāfir hūñ manzil ko jā-rahā-hūñ – pēt kī khātir riksha chalā-rahā hūñ.

"I am a traveller, and I am heading off to a destination. – To earn a mere living (lit. to fill my stomach), I drive a rickshaw."

Na koi umang hai – na koi pasand hai. Merī zindagī hai kyā – ek katī patang hai.

I have no wish, no desire. My existence is purposeless' (lit. "What is my life – nothing like a free-floating kite").

Kyūñ gāoñ se nikal-kar – gunahgār hue ham. Is ba ronaq shahr meñ – khwār hue ham.

"Why on earth I left my village as a sinner; to be disgraceful in this boisterous city."

Āgiyā qismat-wālā – jalne-wālā kā munh-kālā.

"Curse on those who feel jealous/envious; from someone fortunate."

Kyā karūñ pardesī hūñ – āp se dūr hūñ. Dunyā khūshī se jhūm-rahī – main majbūr hūñ.

"What should I do, I am a stranger, far away from you. The world seems joyous, but I feel vulnerable." (or: "The world is joyous, but I feel helpless without you, far away in an unknown territory, what should I do.")

And, of course, one also comes across the famous formula often found on trucks:

Dekh magar pyār se. – "Look, but with love."

Rickshaw Decoration in Sukkur

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s a remarkable form of rickshaw decoration developed in Sukkur (pronounced *Sakkar*), a city on the west bank of the river Indus in the north of Sindh. The specialized rickshaw market known for its charming paintings is situated in two lanes in the quarter of Qasimabad. It is said to be the only such market in the entire North of Sindh. This local pictorial art has become so popular that rickshaws made in Sukkur are now also seen in Karachi.

The craftsmen in Sukkur are all Sindhis, some are specialized on metalwork, others on cushioning and members of the Malik family are painters. During my short visits in November 2017 and January 2019 I focused on the paintings made by Anis (32 years old) and his younger brother Junaid (24 years old) who both learned from their elder brother Ghulam Mustafa who passed away some years ago. Another well-known artist signs his works with the name Shahrukh. These painters above all embellish rickshaws with paintings, stickers and inscriptions, but are at times also commissioned to decorate trucks and tractors.

The main "picture panel" is on the lower back of the vehicle's body (Fig. 12). It is executed in different rectangular formats, often trapezoid. Smaller portraits, also in vertical format, are painted on the right and left of the front wheel as well as on the wind-screen (Fig. 13). There is a wide range of motifs which the owner of the rickshaw can choose from. At present pictures of actors and actresses, sometimes in the context of



Fig. 12 Splendidly decorated back of a rickshaw in Sukkur; picture with the actor Salman Khan painted by the artist Shahrukh (J.W. Frembgen; January 2019)



Fig. 13 Front of a rickshaw in Sukkur with several painted decorations (J.W. Frembgen; January 2019)



Fig. 14 The Indian actor Sanjay Dutt as a gambler with a dagger; close-up from Fig. 13 (J.W. Frembgen; January 2019)



Fig. 15 Sanjay Dutt depicted as a warrior with bow and quiver on a rickshaw in Sukkur (J.W. Frembgen; January 2019)

films scenes, are immensely popular (Frembgen 2021). The famous Indian actor Sanjay Dutt, for instance, is often depicted on rickshaws, usually appearing in different roles and appearances (Fig. 14–15). Anis told me that he had seen these movies so often that he would not need any images to look at while working. And in general he would paint from his own imagination. In a nocturnal scene the Pakistani actress Saima is shown in



Fig. 16 The Pakistani actress Saima holding a wine glass; picture panel on a rickshaw in Sukkur (J.W. Frembgen; November 2017)



Fig. 17 Image of a hashish smoking hunter or warrior and a dancing woman; picture panel on a rickshaw in Sukkur (J.W. Frembgen; January 2019)



Fig. 18 Arab falconer depicted on a rickshaw in Sukkur (J.W. Frembgen; January 2019)



Fig. 19 Sufi saint with a black horse on a small picture panel; rickshaw in Sukkur (J.W. Frembgen; November 2019)

a pensive mood leaning on a window sill and holding a wine glass (Fig. 16). The close-up of another remarkable scene shows a bearded hunter or warrior (carrying a rifle on his back) in the foreground who smokes a *chillam*, a clay pipe filled with hashish, while a long-haired vamp dressed in red dances around a fire in the presence of armed men (Fig. 17). This painted scene, signed by Junaid, had apparently been borrowed from one of the “spicy” *masala* melodramas which typically focus on violence, eroticism and romantic love. Other scenes breathing the air of popular art show veiled women with camels in the background perhaps invoking memories of famous love epics or, for example, a tattooed Arab who wears green sunglasses and caresses a falcon with the caption KING written underneath (Fig. 18). The latter image may be understood as a critical comment to the periodic visits of rich Arab falconers who roam the wilderness of Sindh driven around in SUVs to hunt rare birds.

Apart from this distinctively popular genre of contemporary pictorial art, other motifs and scenes reflect the charm of folk art. We see, for instance, the red-robed Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar dancing with a lute in his left in front of a black horse (Fig. 19) and a rearing white horse without rider but with ornate bridle, sabre, shield and a red rose placed on the saddle which refers to one of the Shia martyrs (Fig. 20). A fine exam-



Fig. 20 White horse of a Shia martyr depicted on a rickshaw in Sukkur (J.W. Frembgen; January 2019)



Fig. 21 Peacock and falcon depicted on the back of a rickshaw in Sukkur (J.W. Frembgen; November 2017)



Fig. 22 Figural and floral decoration on a rear light; rickshaw in Sukkur (J.W. Frembgen; January 2019)



Fig. 23 Exceptional composition of a miraculous bird; rickshaw in Sukkur (J.W. Frembgen; January 2019)

ple of folk art is the depiction of a majestic peacock who is about to be attacked by a falcon sitting on a rock; additionally, there is a frame with the face of a mysterious female (Fig. 21). Peacocks figure prominently on pictures showing idealized landscapes just as in truck art. The flowery painting style called *gulkārī* known from trucks (Elias 2011: 117) is also found on rickshaws made in Sukkur, even small spaces, such as a rear light, is at times decorated with floral patterns and in this case with a bird which keeps a ribbon with a dangling red heart in its beak (Fig. 22). The latter motif was photographed by Karl Wutt already in 1980 in Peshawar whereby the bird carries a necklace with a jewelled pendant. It goes back to the ancient Sasanid motif of a bird with a pearl



Fig. 24 Artist Junaid painting stickers; Sukkur (J.W. Frembgen; January 2019)

necklace in its beak (Centlivres-Demont 1976: 32). An exceptionally charming and original composition shows a miraculous bird: its outlines formed by a leafy cartouche, its head, eye and beak shaped as a feather and thus creating a baffling hybrid, the bird picking with its beak from a bud, its tail funnily turned into a red heart (Fig. 23). The bird's body is inscribed with a short imperative in vernacular Urdu: *hōsh kar* – “Watch out!” Similar floral outlines are found on motifs handpainted by Junaid which are then cut out and printed as stickers to be pasted on rickshaws (Fig. 24). Since about fifteen years this technique called *reddi maid kām* (“ready made work”) is done in Sukkur. The same motifs are also painted inside on the windscreen with the help of stencils.

Concluding Remarks

The present survey on rickshaw decoration in Pakistan over the last three to four decades exemplified that this chiefly urban folk art has been remarkably creative in its various styles of distinctive local character. Differences became mainly apparent in material and motifs. While in Peshawar the most ornate rickshaws were made with a predilection for paintings inspired by movies in which violence and drama plays a prominent role, those decorated in Lahore and Karachi show a mix of elements whereby vernacular calligraphy has become more and more important, to some extent reflecting the growing Islamization of Pakistan. Nevertheless, in terms of vernacular calligraphy the surface of the rickshaw also provides a space to express mystic piety with visual means. Thus, honorific names of Pakistan's most popular Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar acquired an iconic quality. In any case inscriptions as well as stickers offer the chance to express the religious identity of the driver or the owner of the vehicle. In general, decoration shows a tendency to shift from figural motifs to inscriptions. In this regard the flourishing pictorial style of Sukkur with its gaudy colours makes a remarkable difference. Yet, as mentioned above, over the last years many rickshaws simply remain without any decoration, apparently reflecting the modern rational mindset.

Finally, to shed yet another light on this popular visual art, I want to quote from an interview with the contemporary artist Nazia Ejaz, a daughter of Pakistan's melody queen Madam Noor Jehan, who graduated from the National College of Arts in Lahore and from the Slade School of Art in London. In one of her series of paintings she focused on cityscape and rickshaws from Lahore and commented:

These vehicles are not very different from portraits and have vibrantly colourful personalities, like the thriving middle classes they transport. They are loud, noisy, crowded, polluting, festive, improvised, uncomfortable and sometimes broken but always cheerful (in Masood 2014: 14).

Similarly to the love of truck drivers for their much larger and heavier vehicles, also rickshaw drivers feel a special bond to their scooters with which they earn their living; at times they carefully protect them from the dust and dirt of the roads with the help of a tarpaulin.

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