
NASTALIQ: A NEW FORM OF ART IN INDIA

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Abstract: The emerging discipline of the history of the book places particular emphasis on the relationship between text, script, and the image through a study of 'text-and-image' (text and its relationships with the illustration or image), the attendant components, miniatures and calligraphic scripts. In medieval India, the Mughal patronage nurtured the arts of calligraphy and miniature paintings in the process strengthening the relationship between the text and the image. Medieval India was the period when calligraphy was elevated as an art form on a par with miniature painting, without any artistic binary distinctions such as high/low, studio/karkhana, modern/traditional, and elite/popular. During the colonial era, Orientalist attitudes attached to the establishment of art schools in Lahore, Madras, Calcutta and Bombay denied the expression of local aesthetics and regional cultural identities by denigrating respected local artistic traditions. For instance, Euro-American academia attached the significance to calligraphic styles if they were related to Quranic scripture, thus often overlooking the profoundly dynamic field of calligraphic arts itself. However, with the advent of printing technology, the Nastaliq—a Perso-Arabic script—and the popular idiom of the art of calligraphy in the Indian subcontinent, such as case of Bazaar images, became "doubly peripheral to the spatiotemporal categories of the world according to art history." Thus, as the advent of the printer allowed their physical separation, the historic text-and-image bond between calligraphy and miniature was broken. Subsequently, miniature found Nawabs as new patrons, who gave the discipline a new outlook as an independent art form. The art of calligraphy found its way into popular culture, and calligraphers increasingly turned to Urdu newspapers and printing-presses, one of the mass-produced forms of colonial visual culture, to practice and display their artistry. This paper explores the historical development of Nastaliq, tracing how Nastaliq became popular among both the general public and elite and how Nastaliq developed its bonds with Punjabi and Urdu languages. It endeavors to ascertain the lost status of Nastaliq as an art form parallel to miniature painting in the text-and-image relationships in the medieval period in India.

Introduction

The Nastaliq is a Perso-Arabic script used as the preferred style for a variety of languages, Dari and Pashto in Afghanistan, and Persian in Iran. Nastaliq's

popularity extends to South Asia where the calligraphic hand is utilized by the Urdu and Kashmiri languages in India and Pakistan. In Pakistan, Punjabi and Saraiki are also written in this script. Through its usage in various languages over the centuries, the Nastaliq script has developed an exclusive relationship with the Punjabi and Urdu languages.

The association between the art of calligraphy and the Islamic/Quranic/sacred calligraphy is so strong that it often precludes discussion or consideration of its historical and secular development. Therefore, it is important to note that this study is not concerned with the calligraphy of the Quranic scripture, which was recognized as the principal “Islamic art” form within formal western appraisals of art. Instead, a concentration on the aesthetic development of the Nastaliq, which appeared during the medieval India, will constitute the focus of this study. The Nastaliq was invented in Iran and refined in India during the Sultanate period, a period characterized by renewed artistic engagement between cultures. The scope of this paper will be limited to the particular idiom of Nastaliq, which was developed in India, and is distinctive from the Turkish, Afghan or Iranian styles. Nonetheless, I do not intend to draw comparison between these idioms either. This paper endeavors to ascertain the lost status of the Nastaliq as an art form parallel to miniature painting during the medieval era in India. The paper focuses on the secular image of the Nastaliq through its usage in non-religious text and unusual popularity in the general public. This feature is contrary to the Sulus, the Naskh and the Kufic scripts, which have been admired by the elite and known for the calligraphy of the Islamic or the Quranic scripture.

There is an impressive body of works that focuses on the Islamic calligraphy in the Indian subcontinent. The majority of which discuss historical developments of the Nastaliq, but only partially and not completely, for two main reasons. First, this is due to the critical stance of Oriental philosophy towards the Islamic arts, which underscores the proscription of the painting of living beings as the only cause for the development of the tradition of calligraphy in the Muslim world according to Islamic Sharia.¹ Second, the same calligraphers have been practicing the Nastaliq and all other styles of calligraphy such as the Sulus, the Naskh and the Kufic etc. However, these two books *Nastaliq Nama* (“The Book of Nastaliq”) and *Sarguzashat Khat-e Nastaliq* (“The Story of the Art of Nastaliq”) are noteworthy. The former—authored by Sayyid Anees ul-Hasan, son of Nafees Raqam, one of the most popular calligraphers of Pakistan—is a short treatise that provides an introductory historical background of the Nastaliq. A second book, also composed by the family member of an esteemed

1 Pares Islam Syed Mustafizur Rehman, *Islamic Calligraphy in Medieval India*, (Dacca: University Press Limited, 1979), 5.

artist within the field, was written by Muhammad Abdullah Chughtai. Chugati's brother, Abdul Rehman Chughtai, is regarded as one of the pioneer painters of Pakistan, and his book offers a comprehensive overview of the Nastaliq, investigating the historical developments of the idiom throughout both the pre-Mughal and the Mughal periods. Before exploring the historic bonds between the Nastaliq, Punjabi and Urdu languages and the text-and-image (text and its relationships with the illustration or image) relations between calligraphy and miniature, I will briefly address the question of the invention of Nastaliq in post-Sassanid Persia.

Invention of the Nastaliq in Iran

The historical developments of the Perso-Arabic script show that the Naskh replaced the Kufi, which was then phased out by the rise of Taliq until Nastaliq supplanted the Taliq by becoming popular in Ajam or the non-Arab world. The Taliq script was developed in Iran in the tenth century and is a precursor to the Nastaliq style. There is some controversy regarding the invention of this script, with some historians crediting Hasan Ibn Husain Ali of Fars in 322 AH/934 AD as the author.² However, another faction of historians attributes the invention of the Taliq to Khwaja Taj-ud Din Salman of Isfahan (d. 897 AH), and/or his contemporary, Munshi Abdul Hai Astarabadi.³ Issues of ownership over the script aside, no historians deny that the Taliq is a seventh style of writing, and that it is a combination of the Tawqi and the Riqā. Both, the Tawqi and the Riqā styles were invented by Abu Ali Muhammad Ibn Ali Ibn Muqlah al-Shirazi (885-6–940 AD).⁴

There are two generally accepted reasons supporting the creation of Taliq as a combined script: (1) popular aesthetic convention and (2) the reality imposed by time constraints. Office secretaries combined the last letter of the first word with the first letter of the second word, extending this practice to the haroof-e munfasila (alphabets written separately).⁵ As the style developed, calligraphers began to join the kashish (flourish) and dwair (circles) of the preceding words with the flourishes and circles of the following words.⁶ This

2 Maulvi Ehtram Uddin Ahmed Shaghil Usmani, *Sahifa-e Khush Nawisan*, (Nai Dilli: Qaumi Council Barai Farogh-e Urdu Zaban, 1987), 61.

3 Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Chughtai, *Sar Guzasht-e Khat-e Nastaliq*, (Lahore: Kitab Khan-e Nauras, 1970), 10.; and Prof. Sayyid Muhammad Saleem, *Tarikh-e Khat Wa Khattatin*, (Karachi: Zawar Academy Publications, 2001), 134.

4 Ibn Muqlah is also traditionally credited with inventing sitta., i.e. six styles of writing, Sulus, Tawqi, Muhaqqaq, Naskh, Raihan and Riqā.

5 Prof. Sayyid Muhammad Saleem, *Tarikh-e Khat Wa Khattatin*, (Karachi: Zawar Academy Publications, 2001), 134.

6 Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Chughtai, *Sar Guzasht-e Khat-e Nastaliq*, (Lahore: Kitab Khan-e Nauras, 1970), 9.

practice resulted in the round forms and exaggerated horizontal strokes that characterize the Taliq. The letters were derived primarily from the Riqa script whereas the ornate and sloping quality of the written lines were rooted in the Tawqi script. Aesthetically, the invention of Taliq was the first new style of writing that pleased non-Arab eyes and was uninfluenced by the Naskh.

Another theory attributes the invention of the Taliq to headiness, or the need for expedition in official and administrative affairs. As the secretaries or scribes had an invariably short time to take the dictation, they developed a style which exaggerated horizontal flourishes and beautiful rounded shapes in the writings of official correspondence, both saving time and creating a distinct aesthetic. Interestingly, this new idiom of writing soon became popular amongst both the general public and the elite and was subsequently recognized as a *khat*⁷ or an authentic style of calligraphy.

Nastaliq is the most influential script that was developed in Persia during the post-Sassanid era. Within the history of Islamic calligraphy, the invention of the script of Nastaliq stands not only as a revolutionary development, but also as a great riddle in the history of calligraphy. Historians traditionally hold two different viewpoints on this issue. Most historians unduly credit Khwajah Mir Ali Tabrizi (d. 850 AH/1446-7 AD) for the invention of Nastaliq,⁸ yet, they have failed to adequately justify this presumption. On the other hand, a few historians posit that Mir Ali Tabrizi did not invent this style of writing (see Fig. 1), rather he was merely the first calligrapher to give this ordinary style a definite shape and grace, and thus, he paved the way for its subsequent developments.⁹ The latter viewpoint supported by Abul Fazal, the court historian of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, contended:

They say that Mir Ali of Tabriz, a contemporary of Timur, derived it from the Naskh and the Taliq; but this can scarcely be correct, because there exist books in the Nastaliq character, written before Timur's time.¹⁰

Etymologically, the term “Nastaliq” is a Persian derivation of Arabic words the “Naskh” literally meaning “abrogation” or “abolition” or “cancellation,” and

7 Khat – Originally meant a line dug into ground or drawn in sand by a stick or finger. Then it was used for a line ruled on paper or parchment and a line of writing. Essentially khat means handwriting.

8 Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Chughtai, *Sar Guzash-t-e Khat-e Nastaliq*, (Lahore: Kitab Khan-e Nauras, 1970), 9.

9 Hafiz Sayyid Anees Al-Hasan, *Nastaliq Nama: Asar-e Khamah-e Nafees Raqam*, (Lahore: Darul Nafais, 2004), 12.

10 Abul Fazal Allami, *Ain-i Akbari, Vol. I.*, Trans. H. Blochmann, (Calcutta: The Baptist Mission Press, 1873), 101.

the “Taliq” meaning “suspending” (art). It can be argued that the new style of writing called Nastaliq is a combination of the two different styles known as the Naskh and the Taliq. The qualities of both styles are reflected through the Nastaliq. However, the term Naskh-e Taliq, of which Nastaliq is an abbreviation, offers us a more credible, etymological explanation.

According to Abdullah Chughtai, the Iranians created a new script of Nastaliq in order to differentiate their Persian writings from the Arabic.¹¹ Similar to the innovation theories attendant to the Taliq, the invention of Nastaliq was explained as a similar effort made by the Persians to reconstruct Persian or Ajami identity, at the level of the writing style. It follows that Nastaliq was formulated as a response to the saturation of the Sulus, the Naskh, and the Kufic scripts which were popular writing styles of the Quranic text and subsequently held strong bonds with the Arabic language. According to Chughtai, the emergent new script of Nastaliq was widely adopted for daily use and secular writings.¹² Chughtai’s description of Nastaliq development accords with the widely accepted view among historians that in the early fifteenth century, Mir Ali gave a definite shape and name to an existing style which had been in ordinary use for a long time but was not yet recognized by established calligraphers. Mir Ali’s genius saw the immense possibilities inherent to this ordinary style and he then transformed it into an elegant flowing style. Mir Ali’s success in further developing Nastaliq earned him universal recognition and acclaim.¹³ Similar to the Taliq, the contributions of Mir Ali to the development of the Nastaliq were particularly pleasing to Persian or non-Arab eyes.

Evolution of the Nastaliq in Medieval India

The Muslim presence in India stretches back at least a thousand years, with the medieval period serving as a high point of exchange characterized mainly by Muslim contributions toward the development of Indian cultures and civilization, especially in the realms of painting, architecture, music, language and literature. Book art, in particular, was an area of intense cooperation, support, and exchange. The Muslim contribution to the book arts or artistic and technological developments for the transmission of knowledge provided a foundation for Ulrike Stark’s “communication revolution” produced after the advent of print-technology in the colonial era.¹⁴

11 Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Chughtai, *Sar Guzasht-e Khat-e Nastaliq*, (Lahore: Kitab Khan-e Nauras, 1970), 16.

12 Ibid.

13 Pares Islam Syed Mustafizur Rehman, *Islamic Calligraphy in Medieval India*, (Dacca: University Press Limited, 1979), 7-8.

14 Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India 1858-1895*, (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007), 5.

The history of book arts in India reveals that the Nastaliq, in addition to its affinity with Punjabi and Urdu languages, was able to develop text-and-image relationships with the miniature paintings in idyllic environments in medieval India under the Mughal Court patronage. There are a number of inscriptions and manuscripts written in Nastaliq during the pre-Mughal period in India that refute the judgment of some scholars that the use of Nastaliq did not prevail in India until the advent of Mughal rule.¹⁵ The majority Iranian and Turk Mughal aristocracy used Persian as the official language of India. At the start of the Mughal period, the new script of Nastaliq was already equally popular amongst the elite and with the public in Iran and India, therefore, it was an inevitability that the Mughal monarchs, princes, princesses, and the Indian elites would develop a fascination with this new form of calligraphy. Ultimately, we see, from Babur to Bahadur Shah Zafar, how keen Mughals and their elites were to patronize the Nastaliq specifically within the book arts and in general circumstance too.

The founder of the Mughal dynasty, Babur (1526-1530), was a practitioner of calligraphic arts, and he claimed to have devised a kind of script called Khat-e Baburi. The subsequent Mughal emperor, Hamayun (r. 1555-1556), had a well-documented affinity for painting and calligraphy, and he made a habit of inviting a number of ambitious artists and calligraphers to visit his place in India. The most renowned of his guests were Khwaja Abdul Samad Shirazi and Mir Sayyid Ali Tabrizi. Hamayun's successor, the great Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) could not himself master the art of calligraphy, yet he too he was famous for his generous patronage of both miniature painters and calligraphers. During his reign, calligraphers came from Persia to join the service of Akbar and Indians with artistic talent also flocked to his court. Abul Fazal says:

His Majesty shows much regard for the art and takes a great interest in the different systems [styles] of writing; hence the large number of skillful calligraphists. Nastaliq has especially received a new impetus.¹⁶

Emperor Jahangir, apart from his deep love for miniature painting, also had very good handwriting skills, and he offered all of his sons training in the art of calligraphy as well. Prince Khusraw, Sultan Perwaiz and Prince Khurram

15 Pares Islam Syed Mustafizur Rehman, *Islamic Calligraphy in Medieval India*, (Dacca: University Press Limited, 1979), 30.

16 Abul Fazal Allami, *Ain-i Akbari, Vol. I.*, Trans. H. Blochmann, (Calcutta: The Baptist Mission Press, 1873), 102.

(Emperor Shahjahan) were all notably proficient in the art of calligraphy. The princesses were never behind their male counterparts. Gulbadan Begum, the youngest daughter of Emperor Babur, Jahan Ara Begum, the eldest daughter of Shahjahan, and Zebun Nisa, the daughter of Aurangzeb, also learned and practiced calligraphy in depth.

For about two centuries, Indian calligraphers exclusively practiced the Iranian form of Nastaliq under their Persian masters. But it was Abdur Rashid Daylami (d. 1670), a royal calligrapher of the Emperor Shahjahan (r. 1627-1658), who made early efforts to transform the Iranian form of Nastaliq to accord with the elements of popular visual taste for calligraphy in India (see Fig: 2). Much later, in the colonial period, Muhammad Amir Rizvi (b. 1857), alias Mir Punja Kash, practiced Nastaliq in the tradition set by Aqa Rashid so skillfully that he was able to develop the style further. He improved upon the form of circles and sharpened the edges of syllabaries which lead to create the new idioms of Nastaliq Dehlvi and Nastaliq Lahori (see Fig. 3).

Historical developments of the book arts in medieval India manifested strong nexuses between certain scripts and languages, i.e. Arab and Perso-Arabic scripts/Punjabi and Urdu and Devnagri/Hindi, etcetera. Likewise, the relationships of the Nastaliq script particularly to the Punjabi and Urdu languages are akin to the bonds between the text and the image. These relationships started after the advent of Islam in India, developed with the growth of the vernaculars, and were nurtured greatly during the medieval period. But the colonial characterization of communities and religions, and languages and scripts, such as Muslims/Urdu and Hindus/Hindi, and Urdu/Perso-Arabic and Hindi/Devnagri scripts respectively as well as the establishment of the critical discipline of art history in the West, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, cut across the Nastaliq in many ways.¹⁷ This impact may be studied in different ways: as a text-and-image and as the exaltation of the Nastaliq as an art form. In fact, this study is not concerned with the historical developments of the Urdu language or literature either, as a corpus of literature is already available on the subject. However, it is important to comprehend the value of the historic relationship of a particular script to the language, which was based on the notions of *rawadari* (tolerance), adaptation and eclectic behavior on the part of their patronage – both the general public and the elite.

17 Interestingly, this colonial characterization of religion, community, script and language is continuous even in India today.



Fig. 1. Nastaliq by Mir Ali Tabrizi (d. 1446-47).

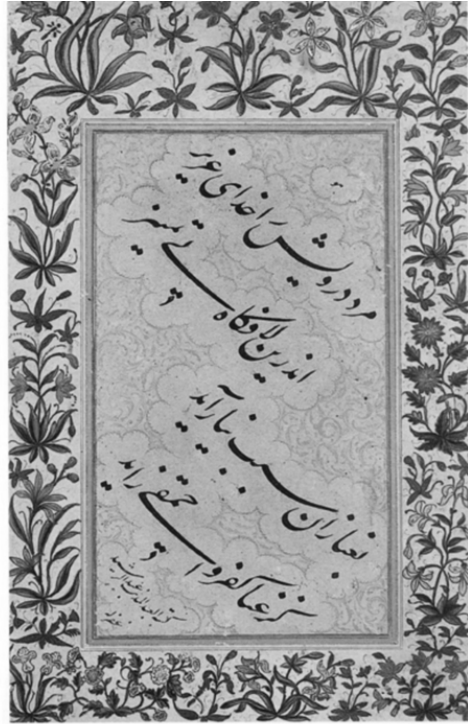


Fig. 2. Nastaliq by Abdur Rashid Daylami (d. 1670).



Fig. 3. Nastaliq Lahori by Taj ul Din Zareen Raqam 1936.

According to some historians, especially those who have heavily relied on the syncretism in medieval India,¹⁸ the appearance of Muslims, from diverse backgrounds in different historical periods, aided the establishment of new social, economic, political, religious and cultural milieus in India. The Muslims came to India as conquerors, “The culture of the Muslims,” as Jamil Jalabi said, “was the culture of a conquering nation. [Yet] It had a full capacity and potential to assimilate great vastness of life.”¹⁹ During the early phases of Muslim settlement in India, the process of syncretism took place, which resulted in the emergence of the new composite culture called Al-Hind ways or Muslim-Hindu culture.²⁰ The distinguishing characteristic of the Al-Hind ways was that it did not eradicate the ancient Indian heritage, but embraced it within a new consciousness of good neighborliness, of sharing together, of joint ownership of the sacral spaces without compromising either of their own respective identities. In Tara Chand’s words, following the notions of *rawadari*:

After the first shock of the conquest was over, the Hindus and the Muslims prepared to find a *via media* whereby to live as neighbours ... [and as a result] a new linguistic synthesis takes place; the Muslim give up his Turkish, Persian and Arabic and adopt the speech of the Hindu. He modifies it like his architecture and painting to his needs and thus evolves a new literary medium – Urdu.²¹

It is evident that the ancient Urdu (Hindvi) started with the rise of modern Hind Aryan languages in 1000 AD as a part of Islamic influence on Indian cultures. It is worth nothing that the Muslims did not bring this language with them, nor did they give it to India, or impose it by force. Rather, Urdu was the organic outcome of daily intercourse between the Persian- and Turkish-speaking troops, its origin reflected through the term “Urdu” itself, a Turkish loan word meaning ‘army’ or ‘camp’.²² Urdu soon became so popular that all Sufis and the Bhakti poets, like Baba Farid, Amir Khusraw, Kabir, Guru Nanak and other notable figures of the Vaishnava cult used the Urdu vernacular

18 Other than Susan Bayly, Derryl MeClean, Asim Roy, and M. Waseem, which Farina Mir has mentioned, Tara Chand, Jurgan Waseem, S. A. A. Rizvi, Imtiaz Ahmad, Irfan Habib, T. N. Madan, Lina M. Fruzzetti, A. R. Saiyid, Kerrin Graefin, V. Schwerin, Patrecia Jeffery, Beatrix Pfeiderer, and many others have heavily relied on syncretism in positive connotation in South Asia.

19 Jamil Jalabi, *Tarikh-e Adab-e Urdu*. (Lahore: Majlis-e Taraqi-e Adab, 2008), 2.

20 Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, (Allahabad: The Indian Press (Pubs.) Private Ltd., 1976), 111.

21 *Ibid.*, 112.

22 T. Grahame Bailey, *A History of Urdu Literature: Heritage of India Series*, (Calcutta: Association Press, 1932), 5-13.

as their medium to convey messages to the masses. Thus, a new common language developed and by the nineteenth century it became the lingua franca of India. Its basic structure and grammar were of Indian origin but the vocabulary borrowed liberally from Turkish, Arabic, Persian and other local dialects.

Interestingly during this time period the Nastaliq was the script adopted by the general public for writing purposes. The Nastaliq was not forcefully imposed by the Sultans of Delhi or the Mughal kings. Considering its immense popularity, the Sufis also used the same script to compose their poetry.²³ In other words, this selection was a result of purely eclectic behaviors on the part of both the elite and popular masses. Perhaps the nature of the visual and the oral/aural taste of the emergent new idiom of Nastaliq and the language of Urdu respectively matched each other. Another reason could, possibly, be the strong relationship of the Nastaliq and the Persian language. The era of the evolution of Urdu,²⁴ and the period in which the relationship between the Nastaliq script with Persian was established coincides, and it seems likely that there is a strong connection between these events. Considering the influence of the Persian language and Persian speakers who came to India at this time, as well as their pivotal role in the early developments of the Urdu language, the emergence of the Nastaliq as a script of Urdu is not surprising at all.

Pares noted: "the Nastaliq came to be used by the general public long before it obtained the official recognition, both in Persia and India".²⁵ In the case of Persia, we know that the Nastaliq was a product of certain political and aesthetic requirements of the Persians (or non-Arabs), but this script, from its very inception, gained traction with the general public. During the pre-Mughal era in India, similar uses of the Nastaliq in the popular culture are also apparent from period inscriptions, written on the shops, wells, gardens, entrance doors of mosques, graves of ordinary men and ladies, and ordinary buildings distinguishing them from those of the royal personalities and edifices.²⁶ It was later that the Safavid in Iran and the Mughals in India recognized the Nastaliq as an independent and authentic form of the art of calligraphy. At the same time, the Nastaliq maintained its secular image due to its usage in popular secular texts. Still, religious texts were not precluded,

23 In the Punjab, Baba Farid, Bulhe Shah, Shah Hussain, Sultan Bahu, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh and many other Sufis also selected the Nastaliq script for the writing of their poetry.

24 The scholarship of the history of the Urdu reflects that the Urdu language started to develop just after the invasion of the Punjab by the Sultan of Ghazna. For further detail see, *Ibid.*; and Muhammad Suhail, "Origin and Development of Urdu Language in the Subcontinent: Contribution of Early Sufia and Mushaikh," *South Asian Studies*, 27:1 (2012): 141-169.

25 Pares Islam Syed Mustafizur Rehman, *Islamic Calligraphy in Medieval India*, (Dacca: University Press Limited, 1979), 30.

26 *Ibid.*, 62.

and a considerable number of Quranic scripture and manuscripts written in Nastaliq are available in libraries and museums worldwide. But the popular gaze never truly developed a visual taste for the sacred text written in Nastaliq and its associations remain strongest with the secular word.

The preference of the general public for the Nastaliq above other scripts, was matched by the Mughal emperors and their nobles, who also cherished and patronized the Nastaliq so generously that this particular idiom of calligraphy became associated with the art of illustration in text-and-image relationships. It was at this time that the calligraphy of Nastaliq was deemed as an art form parallel to the miniature paintings.

Later in the colonial period, indigenous art forms were juxtaposed with western arts in critical art theory, labeled as either exotic or critiqued, local artistic traditions received a pejorative treatment in the canon of modern art academia. For instance, they were generally compared as such: Western/local or indigenous, high/low, studio/karkhana, art/craft, modern/traditional, and elite/popular etcetera. This binary opposition was reinforced through the Orientalist philosophy of Islam and the establishment of the discipline of art history. A literature review of the art of calligraphy in the Muslim world reflects the art of Nastaliq as a form of “Islamic art,” irrespective of its indigenous, cultural, political and aesthetic values.

Presently, some interpretations of Islam focus on minority radical elements in such a manner that “Islam” has become synonymous with “terrorism” or “fundamentalism,” through what Edward Said calls “cultural apparatus”. This “new” image of “Islam” is the legacy of nineteenth-century French and British Orientalism, which propagated the view that “Islam” regulates the Islamic cultures and societies as a single coherent entity. This religious determination of “Islamic” societies continues to inform contemporary characterization of “Islamic” societies as monolithic. Edward Said quoted Walzer in this regard to further his point:

If you speak of Islam you more or less automatically eliminate space and time, you eliminate political complications like democracy, socialism, you eliminate secularism, and you eliminate moral restraints.²⁷

Again, Cornor Cruise O’Brien stated that “certain cultures and subcultures, homes of frustrated causes, are destined breeding grounds for terrorism,” and “the Islamic culture is the most notable example.”²⁸ This very concept does not merely deny historical, regional, and cultural identities to Islam; rather it

²⁷ Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam*, (London: Vintage Books, 1997), 41.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

distorts the political and cultural realities of Islamic societies and bears upon the way its culture is understood. Said refers to this phenomenon as a lazy historical judgment and points out that this incredible stereotyping impacts seriously the understanding of social, democratic, and secular values of indigenous arts, cultures and societies.

The establishment of art schools in Lahore, Madras, Calcutta and Mumbai (erstwhile Bombay) were also coopted by the Orientalists and local aesthetics and cultural tastes were denied by a down casting of the respected local or indigenous arts.

At the same time, the calligraphy of the Quranic scripture was recognized by Euro-American academia and generally referred to as 'Islamic Art'. Without a careful study of the techniques, origins, and significance of the work, 'Islamic Art' became a catch-all, monolithic term used to describe any art from the area. The importance of the printing press not only aided the development of the Nastaliq script, but also led to a rehabilitation of its image in the wake of pervasive Orientalist critiques of indigenous art forms, allowing in case images in the Bazaar, for those images to become "doubly peripheral to the spatiotemporal categories of the world according to art history."²⁹ The historic text-and-image nexuses between the Nastaliq and miniature were broken and the miniature found new patrons under the Nawabs, who viewed miniatures as an independent art form, and the traditional miniature was liberated from its historic text-and-image context. The Nastaliq, due to its relations with the Urdu also, found its way into the more popular arenas and calligraphers used Urdu newspapers and printing-presses to mass produce their visual culture.

According to Abul Fazal, the art of writing was, no less than and, even superior to painting. He noted:

What we call *form* leads us to recognize a body; the body itself leads us to what we call a *notion*, an *idea*. Thus on seeing the form of a letter, we recognize the letter, or a word, and this again will lead us to some idea. Similarly, in the case of what people term a *picture*. But though it is true that painters, especially those of Europe, succeed in drawing figures expressive of the conceptions which the artist has of any of the mental status, so much so, that people may mistake a picture for reality; yet pictures are much inferior to the written letter, inasmuch as the letter may embody the wisdom of bygone ages, and become a means to intellectual progress..."³⁰

29 Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 17.

30 Abul Fazal Allami, *Ain-i Akbari, Vol. I.*, Trans. H. Blochmann, (Calcutta: The Baptist Mission Press, 1873), 97-98.

Abul Fazal held these views on the art of calligraphy at the time in which Nastaliq was also deemed as an art form at par with the miniature painting, yet, as we have discussed earlier, Nastaliq and calligraphic arts lost status as an art form during the colonial period. Practically and theoretically, contemporary and historically, as Jyotindra Jain argues:

Hasn't there been a history of the image [/text-as-image] before the era of art? Moreover founding moments for...discourses on both modernist art and mass culture were one and the same ... the theory of one was the theory of the other.³¹

As this study of the developments within the realm of Nastaliq art has shown, the interdisciplinary aspects of Nastaliq are inseparable from the historical and geographic borders of art history, thus we must understand that it is imperative to rediscover those art forms which have been marginalized in the formalized western history of art and recover their meaning and beauty. Contrary to the previous, marginalized status of this idiom of calligraphy, its new status as “text-as-image” will definitely allow for it to be seen as art history and not only as visual material for anthropological studies. Like the Urdu language, the Nastaliq can be used as a great visual metaphor and stands as an unrivaled testament to the panorama of the great Indian composite cultures.

Conclusion

The Persians developed the Nastaliq from the scripts of Naskh and Taliq for two reasons: (1) the lack of time and (2) the popular aesthetic requirements. Politically, it helped Iranians to reconstruct their Persian or Ajami (non-Arab) identity, at the level of writing style, and aesthetically, it was visually pleasing to Persian or non-Arab eyes. It is difficult to mention exactly when it was invented, yet most historians have agreed that during the early fifteenth century, Khwajah Mir Ali gave definite shape and name to an existing ordinary style of writing to become an elegant flowing style called the Nastaliq.

It came to India with the Muslims, and it is evident that the Nastaliq was in use long before the establishment of the Mughal rule. I find that the Nastaliq in India, like in Persia, had developed its dual relationships: (1) text-and-image relationships with the miniature painting, and (2) text-and-image relationships with the Urdu and Punjabi languages. The Nastaliq could soon become popular among both the general public and the elite due to the aesthetic quality of

31 Jyotindra Jain ed., *India's Popular Culture: Iconic Spaces and Fluid Images*, (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2007), 8.

the emergent new idiom and the language of Urdu matched with the visual, oral/aural taste of the general public and elite in India. In the new artistic environment, it was cherished and nurtured greatly that after practicing Nastaliq under their Persian masters for about two hundred years the Indian artists were able to evolve new forms of Indian idiom popularly known as Nastaliq Dehlvi and Nastaliq Lahori. In both arenas of the public and the elite, calligraphy of the Nastaliq was deemed as an art form parallel to the art of illustration. It was later in the colonial period that due to the orientalist philosophy of the 'Muslims' of the world as a coherent 'monolithic' entity, and of course, the emergence of the art history discipline in the nineteenth century, calligraphy of the Quranic scripture was recognized as authentic and was categorized as "Islamic art," and the Nastaliq, a form of indigenous art was simply ignored. It is also evident that the Nastaliq could never develop relations with the sacred script as it has been able to maintain its secular image in the face of the Sulus, the Naskh and the Kufic.