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- Author (s):** Alia Hadi Ali¹, Marukh Khan², Aqeel Abbas¹
- Affiliation (s):** ¹Pakistan Institute of Fashion and Design, Lahore, Pakistan
²Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan
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Unveiling Symbolism: The Allegorical Tapestry of Female Attire in Poetry and Art of Pakistan

Alia Hadi Ali^{1*}, Marukh Khan², and Aqeel Abbas¹

¹ Pakistan Institute of Fashion and Design, Lahore, Pakistan

² Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan

ABSTRACT The current study sheds light on the representation of traditional women belonging to Punjab and their allegorical representation through Sufism in their poetry and paintings. Women were, and still are an integral part of art and artistic expression throughout human history from pre-history to modern times. The representation of women as an expression of art is an essential aspect of the history of art. This paper highlights the cultural and traditional depiction of women in the art of Chughtai, Ustad Allah Bakhsh, Amrita Sher Gill, and Anna Molka Ahmed through attire and its metaphorical representation by analyzing various form of their arts. The selected paintings focus on the traditional depiction of Women in Punjab, Pakistan, and provide themes, and styles associated with women in paintings of Punjab representing Punjabi culture. Such paintings are very expressive and ideally formalized with great delicacy and devotion, giving importance to womanhood through allegory and allegorical representation. The role of females and their interpretation through Sufi poetry is explained in the visual of painter's work chosen as subject matter. This paper reflects female attire in visual art and poetry of Punjabi culture, prevailing an idiosyncratic Punjabi identity. This study also reflects content analysis of female representation through attire in poetry and painting within the context of the region of Punjab, Pakistan.

INDEX TERMS female attire, metaphoric, poetry and paintings representation, Sufism

I. INTRODUCTION

Sufi poetry is a strong tool that is often used as a means to praise love. It is common observation to find a female narrative in this poetry form where the poet becomes a female expressing his love towards his Lover. Although the figures painted in the paintings are common people belonging to Punjabi culture folk stories and themes related to females in Sufi poetry, Sufi literature is explained with paintings. The folktales interpret hidden

*Corresponding Author: aliahadi@pifd.edu.pk

allegories in elements, such as attire and accessories to present within paintings. Many of the artistic paintings explore the emotions of love and romance, which encompasses the symbolism and metaphor for spiritual devotion.

The beauty of nature surrounds Sufi spiritual expression in minor and major arts. The attributes, that we celebrate draw attention to the fact that Allah is beautiful and loves beauty (Sahīh Muslim, 911). This concept is taken from the core of Islam and interpreted in Sufi writings. Clothes and textiles have been a part of useability to connect with the basic needs of humanity. This leads to the weaving of clothing which is an act to make a surface covering of the body. However, Islamic mysticism, conceived from the Quran, encourages *Zahīr*/outer self-appearance conjoining with *baṭīn*/inner self converting in a form of useability example attire with the spiritual essence of making for Allah.

These inner and outer representations of the nation are expressed in The Quran, which asserts the dignity of man and women symbolized through the word apparel, which is interpreted as a metaphor for protection and honor.

The attributes of God are prevalent in the concept of *Tawhīd* as Muslims that refer to one Allah as God. In designs inspired by Şufism, they recall the *dhikr Allah* or remembrance of God of the dervish starting from a single dot or center of creation. Similar expanding patterns to growth as infinity starts from the center of the pattern. All of this is interpreted by the Sufi poetry concept of contentedness, emotional surrender as female to customs and religious norms converts all concepts into words of poetry and images in paintings [1].

Şufism as a branch of Islam supports weaving as trade with its spiritual significance in creating a meaningful space of practices that unites Islam with indigenous religion and with artistic impulses. One example is the masjid with khanqas having Quran education with skills. Şufism has surfaced in the ways of arts in poetry, music, and textiles [2], [3].

Female representation is a dominant part of Sufism primarily because the concept of love and devotion holds a central position in its teachings; an exclusively feminine emotion, which believed that female representation in Sufi writings is an expression of religious ideas and a symbol of respect. She supported her notion by quoting examples of Muslim societies where

women are held in high reverence. It is for this reason that Sufi poetry or *Sufiana Kalam* is full of feminine narratives.

The characteristic of “gendered imagery” was employed to express profuse love for the Beloved and makes use of human love to explain feelings of Divine love. In this respect, the practice of gender reversal or assuming a woman's role and attributing masculine attributes to God was used. Feminism was used metaphorically, symbolically, and sometimes literally, and through this expression, renowned Sufi poets were able to convey their feelings of immense love for God voiced superior yet delicate experiences, and expressed higher existential truths metaphorically. Sufi poets like Amir Khusro employed the same expressions to express Eternal love and his devotion to his Sufi master Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya. Anjum believed that this expression made Sufi poetry more understandable to a lay reader. As Ibn al-Arabi stated: “Gnostics cannot impart their feelings to other men; they can only indicate them symbolically to those who have begun to experience the like [4], [5].

For the Sufis, metaphors and symbolic writings were like bridges connecting the natural and spiritual worlds, as elaborated by [6]. The symbols depict the external objects, which veil their inward meaning. These inward meanings were the essence and the underlying reality in the said symbol.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study reflects the content analysis of female representation in poetry having metaphoric images of females through attire. This study is quantitative Punjabi poetry, which reflects females through literature and folklore with female subjects that became bases to express the material culture of traditional female attire. Each painting and poetry reference is purposefully selected to give basis to subject of research. The literature used as a reference is dated from the early to mid-nineteen hundred.

A. FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN PUNJAB POETRY AND FOLK LORE

These metaphors represent women and their attire symbolically as a connection to a tradition that is part of their grooming as the females of the province of Punjab. Sufism has always held women in high reverence and recognized prominent female Sufi mystics. Female representation is a dominant part of Sufism primarily because the concept of love and devotion

holds a central position in its teachings; an exclusively feminine emotion. Burney writes in “The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual” that female representation in Sufi writings is an expression of religious ideals as well as a symbol of respect. She supported her notion by quoting examples of Muslim societies where women are held in high reverence. It is for this reason that Sufi poetry or *Sufiana Kalam* is full of feminine narratives. This evidence of local and foreign clothing variance was documented as well. The Rev. Charles Swynnerton, a senior chaplain in the Indian government, documented in 1903 entitled “Romantic Tales from the Panjab” He stated that some of the tales which he documented with costume and social atmosphere connected to antiquities preserved in the Lahore Museum, which was established under the direction Mr Lookwood Kipling who was also the founder of Mayo school of Art later.

Besides, in the province of Punjab, cultural integration dominated as permanent marks in the techniques and materials used to represent women’s tunics. Punjab, in its rich environment, has traditions and customs, which are direct outcomes of oral narration. Rural life of Punjab Pakistan thrives on the classics and fictional characters of Sohni.

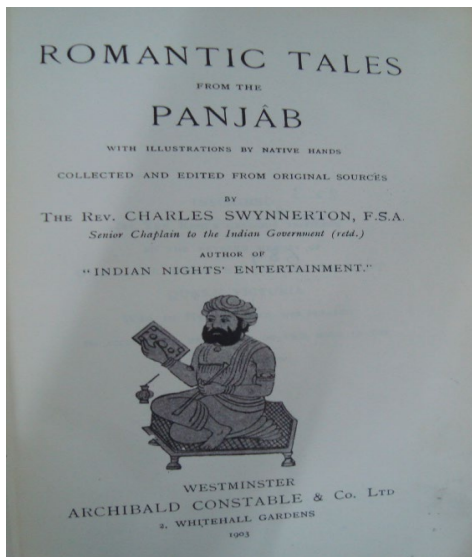


FIGURE 1. Title page of British writer

Reference Charles Swyyerton, Romantic tale from the Panjab, Archibald Constable & co ltd. White Hall Gardens. 1903.



FIGURE 2. Illustrative Folk character Heer

Mahiwal, Heer Ranjha, Laila Majnu, Mirza Saiban. The impact of these fictional tales was to be seen in the subconscious of the artist, and crafts items made by inhabitants raised the status of craft. Handicrafts represent traditional motifs and patterns inspired by folklore in textiles shown in paintings.

B. ROMANTICIZED WOMEN FROM POETIC ILLUSION OF ABDUL REHMAN CHUGHTAI

Art Nouveau and Islamic art traditions are distinctive painting styles influenced by Mughal art concerning miniature painting. Abdul Rehman Chughtai is considered 'the first significant modern Muslim artist from Pakistan' and is also known as the national artist of Pakistan. In Pakistan, he introduced females as basis for representation in its traditional narrative. His interpretation of the folk story of Sassi and Punnu is a romance well known in Chughtai's homeland of the Punjab. In *Punjabi* romance, Prince Punnu is abducted and taken to the desert by Sassi's brothers act is of disapproval of their relationship. The action and warmth of the situation are made with fire color patterns which reflect the scorching heat and dynamism of the event similarly. All the compositions of the painting are composed with the rhythm of the line and delicacy of handling the brush to enhance the sensuality and delicacy of the females painted.

C. CONNECTION OF CRAFT, FOLKLORE, AND SUFISM

These paintings relating to Punjab depict events connected with practices of crafts in female attire of Punjabi women. The information can be extracted from the attire that provides insights about females as part of the formal and contextual aspects of allegory. This gives the research concept of cultural impact and ideological defining their roots through textile as attire focusing on females, which are somehow represented metaphorically through poetry and visuals of painters. The example is like a writer of folklore starts introducing females by explaining household chores in which making of thread washing and drying is the process of self-reflection and catharsis of the event she is emotionally going through. It also yields an understanding of the exclusive skills that artisans nurture over generations. In regions with rich historical pasts and cultural continuity, the crafts assume a character in which one finds layers of cultural identity, aesthetic taste, and expertise.

Attires have a rich historical past and reflect various cultures. The influences on the cultural craft making of Punjab is deeply connected to Sufi

practices and tradition in the subcontinent mazar mystic architecture can be seen from the twelfth century onwards in Multiple cities of Punjab. The cultural norms were affected by the Sufi doctrines which were poetry books written by Sufi and heard by the locals on visiting shrines. The city is blanketed with shrines, tombs, and mosques. The Sufi teaching became basis of group practices of females sitting together and singing while making crafts on shirts/tunics, which resulted in multiple crafts in the region. The thread craft is linked with cultural events affecting the content coming from Sufi teachings.

Shah Hussain's signature style symbolically generates feminine expressions in his poetry from the very first verse. The same trend is observed in this couplet as well. *Neu* is a Punjabi word meaning "heart". Love for them is a sacred feeling, and being related to someone through love is a spiritual connection than a mere emotion like happiness or sadness or anger, for the female gender, love is an altogether different feeling. It is an experience and a rather life-changing experience. Restricting oneself to the subcontinental literature, there are innumerable examples of female love. Punjabi folklore is full of love stories where women sacrifice their very existence for the sake of love and loved ones. The attire of Sassi in the painting is a traditional layered shirt frock-shaped that depicts the simplicity of Sassi and her character's purity. At the same time, ornamented with a surface pattern at the bottom of her attire.

My heart is into heartless Beloved
To the Sovereign of both this world
and the next
Across the river my Lover lives, I
made a pledge and must go to him
Will cross the river along with
boatman

نیوں لا لیا ہے پرواہ دے
نال
وس دین دنی دے شاہ دے نال
ندیوں پار رانجھن دا تھانا، کیتا قول ضروری
جانا
منتاں کراں ملاح دے
نال

D. FEMALE INTERPRETATION OF ABDUR REHMAN CHUGHTAI FOLKLORE

Chughtai, in his paintings, portrayed an epic love story of Sufi poet Waris Shah's Heer Ranjha. The poetry of Waris Shah is popular, and individuals often listen to it through songs or by reading books. The painting focuses on the richness of traditional folkart roots that inspired generations that also shows a bright side of culture with a colorful depiction of the composition

of rural life and its legacy through their style, especially the woman in her traditional form is represented beautifully by the artist.

He represents the female figure in delicate fine detail, embellished with jewelry, and clothing in an oriental atmosphere. The subject matter is depicted with a variety of women in the subcontinent. These paintings have historical events and literary figures of folklore depicting ways of everyday village living. He purely represents traditional North-western women of the Punjab rural area. This image represents the female in the cultural outfit.



FIGURE 3. Woman resting near a seated camel, Sassi. Murraqa-i-Chughtai Paintings of M.A. Rehman Chughtai with the full text of Diwan-i-Ghalib, Lahore 1928

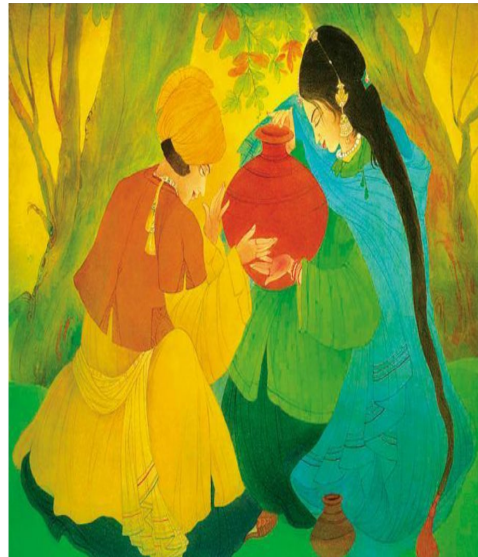


FIGURE 4. Heer Ranjeh: Opaque watercolors on paper (Courtesy by Google)

The reference of Sufi Poet Shah Hussain is described where, textile is considered to be a continuous subject when a feeling of a woman along with her emotions.

O Lord! You are the confidant of
my conditions
You're inside me, You're on the
outside

ربا میرے حال دا محرم
توں
اندر توں ہیں ، باہر
توں

You're in every part of my body	توں	وچ	روم	روم
You're the warp, You're the weft	توں	ہیں	تانا ،	توں
You're my everything Says	توں	میرا	کچھ	سبھ
Hussain the naïve beggar, not me				کہے
but You're everything				فقیر حسین نمانا، میں ناہیں سبھ توں

E. CONTRIBUTIONS OF AMRITA SHER GILL TO THE ART

A few artists displayed their work towards social and radical troubles multiplied during the British Raj. Prevalently, one lady artist Amrita Sher-Gill becomes no longer the handiest conscious of the social and conceptual conflicts of society; however, she depicted ordinary people, mainly Indian girls on canvas. Her father was a Punjabi, and her mother was a Hungarian. She had her early schooling in Florence, after which she went to Paris. She also received admission into the well-known Ecole des Beaux-Arts. She became the first artist in the Indo-Pak subcontinent who discover a way to paint Western artwork. When she stepped to represent the Indian soil, her method, problem, expression, or even spirit transformed entirely [7]. She started the artwork of bodies/figures with a dark complexion who were wearing clothes of shiny colorations. Her contribution to depicting females of the subcontinent was commendable. She portrayed women in her traditional connection and society's restrictions in which our women of Punjab Pakistan live. There is simplicity along with hidden sensuality, which is hidden among females of Punjab. In her artwork, she expressed the suppressed emotion of women through flat colors. Her depiction of females in her surroundings has expressions but eyes their gazes lack confidence. Most of her paintings are long the period when she was staying in the City of Lahore Punjab, Pakistan.

In Pakistani artwork depiction of women has remained in exercise since independence. Amrita Sher Gill is one of the names representing females in its atmosphere 'Vina players' is one of its examples of pluralism in the female representation of Punjab.

In a perfectly created analogy, Sultan Bahu expresses the benefits of the signature feminine sentiment of letting go of her ego. In a painting painted by Amrita Sher Gill, it express colors, and the expression of three girls. Later she gave up everything, including her life, into the hands of her beloved when she won his love. She had to metaphorically sacrifice her life to get the meaning of her life that is her beloved's love. These verses are

precisely what the older women mention to brides-to-be as a reward for the sacrifices and services that they offer in love. The clothing is simple with *Kurta*/shirt and dupattas/scarf covering the head, as commonly used fabric for this is *malmal*/muslin. This fabric is produced in rural areas of Punjab hand spun and weaved.

My Lover has set a fire inside me
who will quench the fire?
How can I know of love, it makes me
bow at every doorstep?
It neither sleeps nor lets one sleep,
but wakes up those asleep
I lay my life for You Bahu, who
unites two lost Lovers

عشق ماہی دے لائیاں اگنیں لگیاں کون بجھا
ہو
میں کیہ جاناں ذات عشق دی در در جا
جھکاوے ہو
نہ سوویں نہ سوون دیوے ستیاں آن
جگاوے ہو
میں قربان تنہاں تے باہو وچھڑے یار
ملاوے ہو



FIGURE 5. The Vina Players. Source, Lahore Museum



FIGURE 6. Group of Three Girls Lahore, 1935. Amrita Sher-Gil. Source: Nevile Tuli. Masterpieces & Museum Quality III, Indian Contemporary Paintings with rare books and vintage film Memorabilia.

F. DEPICTION OF SIMPLICITY AND PURITY USTAD ALLAH BAKHSH ART

Ustad Allah Bakhsh, a renowned Pakistani painter and calligrapher migrated to a newly-born country from India. He painted women belonging to their authentic culture, typically presenting the true essence of Persian and Hindu mythology. Moreover, he also depicted rural life, distinct culture, and Punjab through his paintings, maintaining a true Punjabi idiom. Ustad Allah Bakhsh is one such genius who set up himself as a true example of a self-taught master and a true sponsor of expressing folktales and the pastoral life of rural Punjab. He acquired the skill to paint with cultural nuances and developed his visual vocabulary while navigating the streets of Lahore. Emerging from the small metropolis of Wazirabad, Ustad Allah Bakhsh paved his name as the artists who portrayed various individuals belonging to distinct cultures on the canvas. He painted many paintings in the half of the century when he was young. The primary topic of his paintings spin across the neighborhood and people's cultural history and presents the local culture of Punjab, Pakistan. These females presented the purity of Punjabi rural women. They work equally with their men while holding their babies in their arms.



FIGURE 7. Untitled (Family Scene) Courtesy of Google images.

Traditionally, women have spent their time doing household chores, such as grinding grains, spinning, weaving, or crafting. The folded gota on the edges of a shirt of the female and patterned silhouette is particularly in Punjab, where women were more involved in cotton fields, picking cotton, spinning it into thread, and weaving clothes. The inclusion of feminine narrative with something as mundane as the daily chore of weaving clothes is beautifully used when the poet writes: توں ہیں تانا، توں ہیں بانا

A family illustration painted by Ustad Allah Bakhsh gives a connection that represents the family line, which is also expressed by Shah Hussain in the following verse.

It is explained by Shah Hussain that the connection of charkha (thread weaving wheel) is always moved by females and also illustrates how a connection-wheeling life cycle within a family is carried by a female who not only carry family by living her whole life but she also serves them.

He painted many family scenes. In one portrait, he painted a typical family with two children and one in which the mother is carrying her child beautifully that showcase the dual role of a female; one as a female and one as a mother. It is a simple scene that shows the beauty of the village life that Allah Bakhsh captured and painted. Usually, he preferred to paint village girls from Punjab or from nearby cities in local clothes and jewelry who were busy with their ordinary habitual activities. In his portrait 'Sahelian', he portrayed typical pastoral girls playing with each other in their spare time. Their purity and simplicity are seen through their attire and poses. It is hard to survey the entire collection of Ustad Allah Bakhsh due to evident diversity in his artwork; however, females in their traditional essence are almost similar in all of his work. The illustration depicts a sense of lightness in the atmosphere. These girls are surely unaware of the upcoming challenges of life that are ahead of them. Shah Hussain's signature style is symbolically generating feminine expressions in his poetry.

He painted many canvases showing people going together to a wedding, festival, or any cultural event. These paintings reflect beautiful veracities of rural life where people enjoyed these festivals with banners, colored clothes, and a rhythmic atmosphere. Women in these festivals wore flamboyant dresses and carried babies and baskets full of gifts and clothes for the

wedding they were about to attend. There is a tradition of giving and taking clothes on wedding occasions



FIGURE 8. Sahelian by Ustad Allah Baksh, Source: pakistanpaedia.com/uab

I've given my heart to an uncaring
Beloved
To the Sovereign of both this world
and the next
Across the river, my Lover lives,
I made a pledge and must go to him
I beg the boatman to take me there
Shah Husain, the lowly beggar says,
we will ultimately leave this world
In the end, we are concerned with
God alone

نیوں لا لیا ہے پرواہ دے
نال
اوس دین دنی دے شاہ دے نال
ندیوں پار رانجھن دا تھانا، کیتا قول ضروری
جانا
منتاں کراں ملاح دے نال
کہے حسین فقیر نامانا، دنیا چھوڑ آخر مر
جانا
اوڑک کم اللہ دے
نال



FIGURE 9. Heer waiting for Ranjha. Source: pakistanpaedia.com



FIGURE 10. Punjabi Family. Source: pakistanpaedia.com/uab

In the painting *Heer* (a Punjabi girl) is looking ahead to *Ranjha*, *Heer* is standing in her usual Punjabi dress, she is standing on a rock in a fascinating environment. Vibrancy in the colors shows the rich culture of Punjab with innocent expression and contentment. *Heer* is standing in her traditional setting under a tree waiting for her lover. The same sentiment has been depicted in *Shah Hussain's* couplet. The very use of two ordinary words *Neu* and *Bay-Parwah* emanates a strong feminine narrative of selfless and unconditional love in his poetry [8]–[10].

In following verses, the representation of femininity becomes more eminent:

ندیوں پار رانجھن دا تھانا، کیتا قول ضروری جانا
منتان کران ملاح دے نال

The word *Ranjhan* is used frequently by Sufi poets and is a term associated with God. *Ranjha* is also a famous character of *Waris Shah's* maestro *Heer Ranjha*. *Ranjha* is, thus the hero of the story, and *Heer* is the heroin. In Sufi “love stories”, the one between God and humans, God is given the masculine role of *Ranjha*, while human beings adopt the feminine role of *Heer*.

Hence, his portray wore colored conventional Punjabi garments as indicated in the figure. In this portrait, *Ustad Allah Bakhsh* used vibrant colors in his painting. In another family scene painted by *Ustad Allah Bakhsh*, suggests the love, kindness, affection, and adoration of the daddy for his family, particularly for his daughter standing beside him.

The word ‘Punjab’ means “heart”. This sentiment is often associated with women who give one’s heart to another without any expectation or reward or reciprocation, which is a purely feminine sentiment. Women are known to be romantic and selfless when it comes to love. They are ready to do everything for their beloved without any expectation of reward, recognition, or reciprocal feelings. Love is a sacred feeling, and being related to someone through love is a spiritual connection rather than a mere emotion like happiness, sadness, or anger. However, for the female gender, love is an altogether different feeling. It is an experience that is rather life-changing for oneself. Restricting oneself to the subcontinental literature, there are innumerable examples of female love, which has enriched Punjabi culture. In a likewise manner, Punjabi folklore is full of love stories, narratives

where women sacrificed their very existence for the sake of their family and loved ones.



FIGURE 11. Post stamp Ustad Allah Bakhsh (Heer Ranjaha) Lahore Museum, Pakistan

Besides these conventional landscape and overcrowded paintings, he painted one or more girls in an architectural setting with a parapet and arch. Sometimes lattice work in stone is painted in the background of the figures. With the figures now and then, the carpet is painted inside the centre or the foreground to beautify feminine exquisiteness. Simplicity, limpidness, and loyalty are proven by the faces and movements of those figures that he infuses in his paintings. His portrayal will be preserved as a splendid asset for the future generations of Pakistan. His contribution to holding the lives of the human beings of Punjab is fantastic and his illustrations captivate his viewer's attention.

He died on October 18, 1978, leaving the legacy of his lovers and students. His portrayal will be preserved as a splendid asset for future generations of Pakistan. His contribution to holding the lives of the human beings of Punjab is fantastic.

G. ANNA MOLKA AHMED: REPRESENTATION OF PUNJAB

Prof. Anna Molka Ahmed (1917 –1994) became a pioneer in making Department of Fine Arts in the City of Lahore opposite to the Lahore Museum at Mall Road, Pakistan. At that point in time, the handiest four or five Muslim college students were analyzing art in Lahore and imparting education to girls. She had to go door to door to gather her college students, to educate them regarding arts. These days, a slow disassembling of social classifications can be perceived. Therefore, this is no longer easy, especially in a patriarchal society wherein a guy is dominant since plenty of females

have to warfare tough to carrying women on a sizeable status above or equal to men, and Anna Molka Ahmed is one of them [11]–[15].



FIGURE 12. A Punjabi Women
Ustad Allah Bux, Courtesy by
Google images



FIGURE 13. A Punjabi Family,
Courtesy by Google images

III. CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to showcase female representation and their expression in art and craft, and through poetry, constituting an idiosyncratic Punjabi identity in visual arts precisely in paintings. This study heeded upon the functional significance of craft in visual arts illustrating the practical knowledge, expertise, and hand skills of Pakistani Punjabi culture. It was observed that the transmission of oral traditions into material reality not only constructed narratives of storytelling in textile crafts but it has also become a cultural identity depicting a true Pakistani Punjabi culture. These deep roots of female representation are developed through the intricate artwork of various visual artists who are considered the pioneers of visual arts. Thus, this paper highlighted the cultural and traditional depiction of women in the selected paintings and art of Chughtai, Ustad Allah Bakhsh, Amrita Sher Gill, and Anna Molka Ahmed selected paintings that made a spectacle of Punjabi women, eminent themes, and distinctive styles. These

themes and styles have allegory and deeper meanings in representing women as a whole. Their poetry, while being spiritual in context and Sufi touch, has given vital insights into how female personality attributes were acknowledged and spoken about within Punjab culture and its effect on society. While an intense debate persists regarding ignorance towards females, these poetic verses put forth strong messages of spirituality and reverence towards feminine sentiments. Thus, the incorporation of the female perspective in the communication bestowed significance and profound respect towards femineity. This underscore various ideas in which textile items, such as clothing play a vital role. Therefore, several Sufi poets have inculcated female perspective, while employing femineity as a prevailing feature in their poetry, granting females immense respect in both their perception and in the eyes of their readers.

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