



## Truck Art: Unique Pakistani Cultural Ambassador

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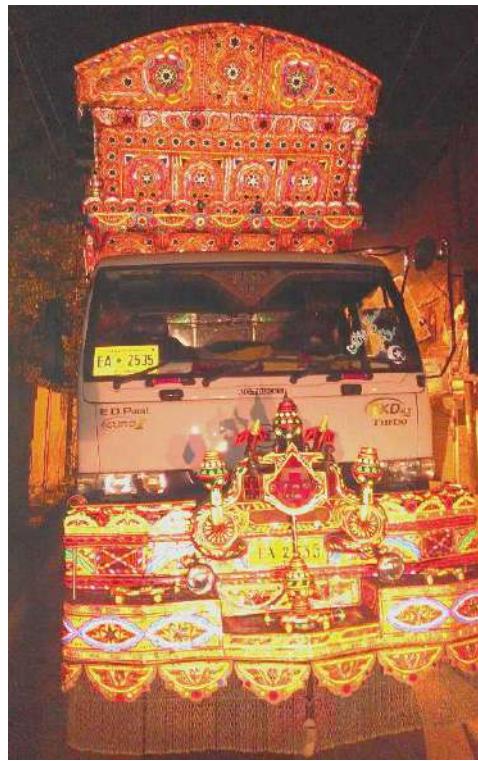
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### ABSTRACT

Pakistan is characterized by the vehicle art that distinguishes it from the other countries. Vehicle art includes truck art, rickshaw art and horse cart art etc. Traditional vehicle is the symbol of any society. It shows the economy and culture of the country and different social factors as well. All these elements collectively contribute as an effective medium of visual communication. In this present research paper interviews of different people concerned to the truck art regarding decorations have been focused. For further information, truck driver's communication is being elaborated which highlights the significance of this unique cultural ambassador.

### Discussion:

Pakistan's truck art is about culture, history, tradition, passion, love and many more. Every little adornment on the truck has special significant. The fanciful natures of truck decorations attract everyone. (fig. 1). The richness of colours and bold motifs reflect the traditions of the country. It also depicts the colourful seasonal environment that is typical of South Asia (Ikram 75). Pakistani culture is associated with South Asian Indian culture.



*Figure 1 Lavishly embellished Pakistani truck, Rahat Afza, JPEG image.*

Vehicle art initiated in Pakistan with the truck art in 1940s. It began when companies started to paint logos to make the truck art recognizable for their illiterate customers. The basic purpose of truck decoration is to design it from outside as well as from inside. The ornamental motifs and the slogans also show the cultural, political and social situations of the country. The attraction of the customers toward the vehicles becomes a business for the drivers. Now a days there is a trend of digital painting besides handmade paintings for quick decorations which are available in the market situated at Band Road Lahore.

Pakistani truck art designs and themes which represent Pakistani culture can be categorized as mentioned below:

1. Idealized elements
2. Ornaments and clothing
3. Religious symbols
4. Calligraphic inscriptions
5. lines of poetry
6. Common funny phrases
7. Beautiful women, national heroes and political leaders
8. Calligraphic inscription

The truck is painted according to the driver's demand, while sometimes according to the artist's choice told by Ustad Rana Tariq and Sons at Sialkot Bypass Gujranwala. Reflection of the ideology points out the area from which the truck is from.



Figure 2 Portrait painting of Benazir Bhutto, a political leader of Pakistan, Rahat Afza, JPEG image.

Most often truck is adorned with portraits encircled by floral motifs and geometric patterns as it is visible in the figure 1. Another truck painter from Khiali, Gujranwala, (fig. 3) additional figures provided:

The art of decorating trucks took 15 days to two months for a truck to be festooned completely while the extra charges are earned when the driver's demands are followed. Approximately, 50,000 rupees are earned for an average truck. First of all, the entire body of the truck is painted with the spray paint machine or compressor. Then the motifs are drawn with chalk or pen and painted with different vibrant colours afterwards. The bright and florescent colours are achieved by the use of enamel paints of various brands such as Master paints, Brighto paints, Deco magic paints and ICI paints etc.<sup>1</sup>

A decorated truck depicts a scene of Sheesh Mahal ("mirror palace") in Lahore fort. This imagery of animals is an inspiration of Mughal court paintings of 16th- and 17th-century. Even the outer arched frame is similar to the murals in Sheesh Mahal (figure 3). Generously adorned trucks in Pakistan looks like: covered in painting, color, lines of poetry and the philosophical phrases as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with a Truck Painter, Rana Tariq, Khiali, Gujranwala.



Figure 3 Beautifully decorated side wall of a truck with paint, Rahat Afza, JPEG image

Imported material is used to create fantastical compositions. Geometrical designs are used by the use of reflected tape. In one of a panel, an idealized fish in simplified form is painted with landscape and corners are filled with delicate metal leaves (fig 5). A fish represents good fortune while human eyes often represent protection from evil eye or so called *nazar*.



Figure 4 Painting of a Fish, Rahat Afza, JPEG image



Figure 5 Decorated flower and birds on sides of a truck, Rahat Afza, JPEG image.



Figure 6 Peacock in metal on the truck, Rahat Afza, JPEG image

Representation of peacock also symbolizes health besides beauty and considered a symbol of royalty (figure 6). The floral motifs include various kinds of flowers like roses and lotus. Rose symbolizes love. The most commonly seen lines or quoted words are: Māṇ kī dua, Jannat kī hawā, etc. Furthermore, Punjabi phrases are so often seen like *phal mosam da, gul wely dī* (seasonal fruit, timely conversation) etc.

For poetry verses the truck drivers take a help of authors or writers. Side panels show painted flora and fauna representations. Most often birds are beautifully composed in a medallion. Pakistani trucks also used as means of displaying the calligraphic board as well as a notice board for public messages. A wide range of motifs are included in the category of modern elements like celebrities' pictures, Pakistani flag and portraits of national heroes like Shahid Afridi, and a beautiful eastern woman has been depicted with *dopatta* on her head in stylized form (figure 7 and 8).



Figure 7 Idealized portrait of a woman, Rahat Afza, JPEG image

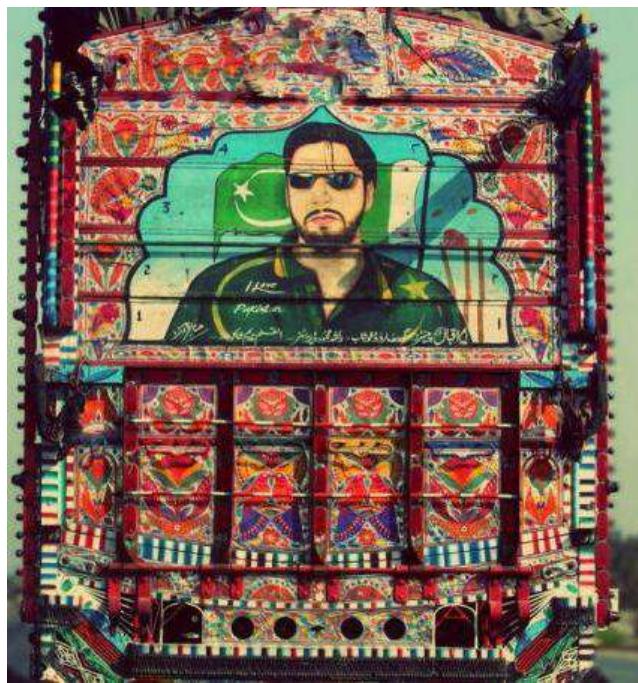


Figure 8 Portrait painting of a cricketer Shahid Afridi on the back side of a truck, Rahat Afza, JPEG image

Some of the motifs, such as the partridge and the peacock are frequently represented on trucks. The category of religious symbols and images consist of the depiction of the Kaaba or the Masjid-e-Nabvi. Some other symbolic representations are also found such as crescent and star that denotes Islam and Pakistan. Burraq, the celestial horse that enriched Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on His journey to heaven is also seen on some vehicles (fig.9).



Figure 9 *Burraq, the celestial horse that enriched Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on his journey to Heaven*, Rahat Afza, JPEG image

A truck driver explained his views as under:

We have all this done because we love it, starting from the base of the truck to the trimmings on top of the cabin, we put it all together. A lot of traditional workers in terms of Mechanics are engaged by the people to get paint or craft onto the trucks and these are the specific skill that has been passed onto for generations. The truck owner sometimes wants us to make the picture of their kid onto the truck, so we make that. Some even ask for the portraits of the famous people like former President Musharaf or even Osama bin Ladin but the rest is all our own choice. There are not only truck drivers who want to get their vehicles decorated in this uniquely Pakistani style but some car drivers too. For over the last decade or so, Truck art has moved from just being something to light up vehicles on the road to Folk art in Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

### Conclusion:

The rich and symbolic decorative motifs with vibrant colours of the vehicle art communicate the optimistic and creative image of Pakistan among the international community. The cultural heritage of Pakistan is bearing fruit. What is even more important, however, is the fact that the pictorial technique becomes coloristic rather than

<sup>2</sup> A truck driver's (Raja Basharat) interview.

linear representing objects. In the total composition also the unity begins to depend not only on distribution of spaces but a harmony of colour, in which different parts merge and mingle together.

Today fashion designers are borrowing inspiration from truck paintings and its attractive bright colours. At last, but not the least truck art is a unique cultural ambassador. It's the lighter side of our Pakistani art. The truck art is being used as a fashion trend these days. Markets display a variety of colorful articles like tea cattles, mugs, trays, wall hangings, key chains, toys and trolleys etc. even some NGOs and institutes are also producing such cultural items and are promoting our culture accordingly.

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