

Islamic Art and Its Spiritual Message

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Abstract

Islamic Art is the art of civilization based on Islamic religion. Moreover, it not only concerned with particular region or particular people rather it is a combination of different civilizations and historical circumstances as painted with Islamic weltanschauung. The Arab civilization is probably more important. Although the Arabs have little art and even then, they developed Islamic art with spiritual characteristics. They were expert in mathematics and geometry and applied their knowledge to formulation of Islamic decoration. Turkish also played important role in Islamic art and its spiritual message. They ruled for a long period upon large part of Islamic world from 10th to 19th century. The Persian art and literature emerged as the main sources of the development of Muslim art of painting, architecture and various forms of Islamic decorative arts. The spiritual aspect remained the dominant factor in all art and thought of Islamic World. In subcontinent, Mughals rulers contributed much to the various Islamic art-forms such as architecture (both sacred and public), miniature art, decorative arts and landscape paintings.

1. Introduction

Art moves human beings and satisfies their emotional dimensions. Artistic emotional response inspires a man to shed light on the profundities of human existence as well as facial appearance of the universe. One universal explanation on the subject of art that has been acknowledged by all thinkers and aestheticians of all the times is 'that "art, a creative course of action is the expression of frame of mind, feeling or spirit.¹ In the entire expansion of art the space-time aspect plays an crucial character. In every epoch and at every phase of human rational advance art becomes a crucial and successful standard to give details of man's inner potentialities. In every religion it has its exceptional place and a crucial character to engage in recreation importance of the true spirit of that religion. Religion and art have their close correlation. The development of the correlation of religion to life has been analogous to the advance of art. The idiosyncratic rationale of art, according to various philosophers and aestheticians, is on the whole advance of human character and the improvement of his mind's eye. Both religion and art contribute to their widespread endeavor to reshape or recreate, the world with a view to communicate an integrated vision to man's personality or give him a holistic point of view upon human existence as well as the encountering celestial circumstances.

Religion has all the way through been a source of stimulation for approximately all creative artists and aestheticians of different ages. From the beginning of man's history till date, religion has proved itself to be a turning point in man's onward civilizational demonstration. Various art-forms such as music, sculpture, painting, calligraphy, architecture and poetry have been profoundly motivated by intense religious consciousness. In every epoch and at every phase, religion has helped an artist to create something new with the help of his idiosyncratic spiritual approaching. Religion, like art, also highlights the emotional aspect of man. This physical world or Nature provides us a deep feeling as well as a 'means' to ecstasy.² Both religion and art have engraved their never-ending special effects on human civilization in prehistoric, medieval and modern epoch. Wundt has rightly understood that "Ideas and feelings are religious which refer to an ideal existence."³ So, according to him, it is a crucial aspiration for the artist to create something and direct people to lead an ideal life. Religion inspires a human being and penetrates every activity of his life. Art is one of the most crucial and dominant mediums of religion. An artist, stimulated by religion, has the astonishing aptitude to characterize a religious subject matter or communication all the way through painting or other art-forms or art-techniques.

II. What is Islamic Art?

Islam is one of, the greatest religions of the world. Its approach to man's life and his spirituality is to some extent different from that of other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity. There is no objective or representation of the Supreme Reality in Islamic art-world to be painted or portrayed as in case of other religions. On the other hand, the consequent Void ('adam) has its distinctive implication in the Islamic art-world. Al-Tawhid (Unity of Being) is the real meaning of Islam and this metaphysical belief of Unity is the spiritual significant of the Void which is the only aspiration and soul of Islamic art.⁴

Allah (God) is not seen like an entity but He is realized as the Supreme Creator of everything. That Allah (God) is anthropomorphically portrayed in the Holy Qur'an as having hands and seated on a throne, should not be taken literally. Such figures of verbal communication purely represent his symbolic demonstration. He has bestowed upon man the supremacy of perception and inspiration. In the present article we shall try to discuss briefly some of the 'most crucial art-forms in order to comprehend the real meaning and implication of Islamic art as well as' its spiritual message. Here we shall also discuss how Islamic art conveys the spiritual and prototypical meaning of Islam itself through a timeless and symbolic language; and how even today this art has the ability to present the spirit of Islam in a much more direct, wholesome and intelligible manner than many other communicative expositions. Generally, the work of art, as we be familiar with, is a well thought-out multifarious of sensuous and communicative fundamentals, and its organization is its form. But in Islamic art man's spiritual dimension has been overemphasized. All art and thought have been derivative from this very emphasis.

According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, it is in reality "to the inner dimension of Islam, to the batin as contained in the manner and elucidated by the Truth that one must turn for the origin of Islamic art. This inner aspect is besides inextricably interrelated to Islamic spirituality."⁵ Man's inwardness has been given much value in Islam. Likewise, it is within the inner aspect of the Islamic tradition that one must seek the origin of Islamic art and the 'power' which has created different 'forms' and sustained them over the ages.⁶ The Qur'an and the prophetic hadith are the main sources of Islamic philosophy as well as Islamic art. All forms of art must be created in the light of the Qur'an and the Tradition of the Prophet. The Qur'an provides the set of guidelines of Unity while the Prophet provides the manifestation of this Unity into multiplicity and the witness to this Unity in His creation.⁷ In brief, Islamic art is the result of the manifestation of Unity upon the plane of multiplicity. It reflects in its own idiosyncratic manner the Unity of the Divine Principle - the dependence of all multiplicity upon the One-Allah (God). This art manifests itself in the substantial order in a straight line perceivable by the senses and the archetypical realities and acts, and as a result, it is a hierarchy for the expedition of the soul from the audio-visual world to the world of Silence and Invisible one.

III. The Spiritual Message of Islamic Art

In order to know the true spirit of Islamic art and its spiritual message and significance, we shall have to comprehend briefly its origin as well as some of its main forms such as calligraphy, architecture, painting, music, poetry and decorative arts in general with special reference to Iran as the contribution of Iran to these Islamic art-forms can be deemed to be second to none. Generally speaking, Islamic art is the art of the civilization based on the Islamic religion. The Prophet Muhammad - the last of the Prophets - first preached Islam in Arabia during the early 7th century A.D. and the people who followed the teachings of Islam called themselves 'Muslims'. Islam has gigantic connotation with regard to every aspect of human life. It defines without a doubt the purpose of life, the universe and the relationship among the Creator (God), man and universe. The intellectual, social, economic, -ethical and aesthetic features of Islamic religion make it distinct from worlds' other great religions.⁸ Thus, during the 7th century A.D. Arab Muslims began a series of conquests and amalgamated all the conquered countries or parts into a 'single civilization' - *millah*. Though the Arabs themselves had sophisticated very little of art yet their aesthetic sensibility enabled them to come into contact with the highly developed arts of Persia (now Iran), Syria, Egypt and Mesopotamia (now Iraq).

Therefore, the people who acknowledged Islam blended their cultural styles and developed a distinct and uniform style of art best acknowledged as 'Islamic art. It is said that Islamic art was an out come of many centuries, extending from Spain to India.⁹ However, there are very realistic and authentic views on the emergence and evolution of Islamic art. They maintain that Islamic art emerged at the same time with the very rise of Islam itself.¹⁰ In this correlation, it is essential to refer to some verses of the Qur'an and few Traditions of the Prophet, which without a doubt endorse the view that Islamic art is inherent in Islam itself:

"We have adorned the lowest heaven with the beauty of the planets."¹¹

"We have placed constellations in heaven and made them beautiful for those who look."¹²

In addition to the above Qur'anic verses, a couple of Traditions of the Prophet(S) would be in order:

"God likes that whenever anyone of you performs any work he should do it in a beautiful manner."¹³

"God is Beautiful and likes Beauty."¹⁴

There is an 'inward intimate relationship between Islamic art and Islamic spirituality and as a result Muslim artists think about the sacred art of Islam to be a descent of heavenly Reality upon the earth. Through this creative activity we maintain our symbolic correlation with an Invisible Spiritual Order. "To be spiritual" in the words of George Santayana, "is to live in the presence of the ideal".¹⁵ This 'Ideal' is Allah (God) who is the cause of everything. In the words of G.T.W. Patrick:

God is the soul of the world, an indwelling spiritual presence, a creative, organizing and perfecting power, the source of our moral religious and aesthetic ideals.¹⁶

Spirituality is profoundly interlinked with religion, although they are not interchangeable terms. Durant Drake has well explained the meaning of 'spirituality' and its relation to 'religion' in the following words:

The disposition of the heart and will, through which a man comes to care for the highest things and to live in gentleness and inward calm above the surface aspects and accidents of life, we call, in its inner nature, spirituality; when it is embodied in outward forms and institutions, and spread among whole communities, we call it a religion.¹⁷

Muslim artists tried (and still try) to create every art-form by invoking in them the Power and Blessing of the Supreme Reality. It is His gifted creative energy that man can create and appreciate a number of art-forms. While creating 'beauty' in his product the artist or architect always thinks of Allah (God) as the Supreme Beauty (*Jamal*) and He is Present (*Hadir*) everywhere. Islamic art keeps us united before the Divine Presence. It paves the manner for the explorer who wishes to enter the ultimate *Sanctum-Sanctorum* of Divine Revelation. If we take no notice of or demolish this art in the present day crisis ridden world, we without doubt cut Muslims away from their spiritual moorings for the reason that this art is the onward expression of the inner spirit of Islam. This inner spirit or dimension, according to Hossein Nasr, is inextricably correlated to Islamic spirituality. He further explains that the term 'spirituality' in Islamic languages is connected to either the word *ruh* denoting 'spirit' or *ma'na* signifying 'meaning'. In both cases the very terms imply inwardness and interiority. Consequently, it is within the inner dimension of the Islamic tradition that one must seek the origin of Islamic Art and the strength which has created and sustained it throughout the centuries.¹⁸

Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and Hazrat 'Ali (R.A) both are considered as the dominant personalities to symbolize the inner dimension of Islamic message in an articulate manner. Both Sunni and Shi'ah Muslims have great regard and affection for them. The great masters of Islamic art have always shown a special love and devotion to them. It is only the Muhammadan grace which has made the sacred art of Islam possible; and it is the personality of Hazrat Ali (R.A) who was the founder of basic arts such as calligraphy etc., and Sufi orders which has maintained the true spirit or say the mysterious teachings of Islām.¹⁹ Of all the Islamic forms we shall, at present, concentrate mainly on Islamic calligraphy, Islamic architecture, poetry (especially Sufi poetry) and music. Pointing out the characteristic feature of a fine calligraphy, one of the most primordial Islamic art-forms, Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib says, "The beauty of writing is the tongue of the hand" and the elegance of thought." Similarly Abu Hayyan al Tawhidi remarks: "Handwriting is jewelry fashioned by the hand from the pure gold of the intellect."²⁰ In the field of Islamic art, this art-form did first emerge in Arabic script with a view to write the Words of the Holy Qur'an. The Arabic script rapidly developed in many styles such as *Kufi*, *Naskh* etc. proving itself as an astonishingly beautiful artistic medium.

With the advent of Islam, it assumed a 'sacred' status because of the fact that this was the script especially chosen by God (*Allah*) to transmit His message to all human beings. Consequently, a need was felt to record the Qur'an and to design a beautiful style of writing for the message. All this played a central role in the development of the script- simultaneously encapsulating clarity, legibility at beauty. Thus at this stage Arabic script ceases to be merely the script but becomes 'Islamic calligraphy' embellished by trained and creative artist-scribes. The word 'Islamic' is used with calligraphy to symbolize that the Arabic script had a spiritual or metaphysical foundation because it was the language of the Qur'an and the followers of Islam developed it in several variants, well thought-out it 'sacred' and regarded it as an expression both of art and of religion. The Islamic calligraphy has a metaphysical basis due to which it is well thought-out as 'Sacred Art' in Islamic culture. It has a distinctive spiritual message to convey. The foundation of the sacred calligraphy is the visual incarnation of the Sacred Word.²¹ Highlighting the importance of comprehension and pen the Qur'an says:

Recite: In the Name of your Lord who created, created man from clots of blood.²¹

Recite: And your Lord is the Most Generous, He who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.²²

The above verses of the Qur'an lay emphasis on the importance of 'ilm (knowledge) and *qalam* (pen). In the very first verses of the Chapter *al-'Alaq* (the Clot) the Prophet (Muhammad) is well thought-out to 'read' (Iqra) and make use of 'pen' (*qalam*). There is a special Chapter (*Surah*) entitled '*al-qalam*' (The Pen) which opens with an Arabic letter *nun* followed by the Verses:

"Nun! By the Pen and what they write down."²³

Some scholars like Kamal al-Din Husayn Kashifi, R. Guenon etc. are of the judgment that the letter nun in Arabic resembles an 'ink pot' which contains the ink with which the Divine pen had written the archetypes of all beings or things upon the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawh al-Mahfuz*).

The 'Book' contains all the Divine creative possibilities and it is up to man to explain them into realities.²⁴ Having a metaphysical foundation to it, Islamic calligraphy became a source of spiritual stimulation as well as a sacred medium of communication between man and God (Allah). Highlighting the spiritual basis of this art, Seyyed Hossein Nasr refers to the Ninth/fifteenth century famous Persian Sufi scholar Kamal al-Din Husayn Kashifi who marvelously explains (in his Qur'anic commentary *Mawahib-i 'Aliyyah*) the mystical background of the above verse of the Chapter al-qalam saying that the initial letter 'nun' is for 'light' (*al-nur*) which was the first reality created by Allah (according to tradition) and the last letter '*al-Rahman*' stands for the Divine Mercy (by virtue of which all creation was brought forth). In this connection, he still further refers to the same Persian Sufi with regard to the spiritual significance of Islamic calligraphy. Kashifi thus summarizes the metaphysical foundation of calligraphy based upon the Qur'anic symbol of the Pen and the Inkpot, of nun and Qalam, providing a key for the understanding of the metaphysical principle and spiritual significance of Islamic calligraphy and the role that calligraphy plays in the religious and artistic life of traditional Islam.²⁵

The Holy Qur'an (The Word of Allah) is the source of every art-form according to Muslim artists and aestheticians. They believe that the origin of the sacred calligraphy is the visual incarnation of the Sacred Word. The Divine Pen (*al-qalam*) wrote the Realities of all things upon the Guarded Tablet as mentioned earlier. The Qur'an itself further attests the writing material - 'pen' and 'ink' - in the following verse that says:

If all the trees on earth were pens and all the sea, with seven more seas besides, was ink Allah's words still would not run dry. Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.²⁶

This verse, on the one hand, indicates that the 'pen' and 'ink' are the source to acknowledge God for His countless gifts bestowed upon human beings and on the other, His words: the astonishing signs (Ayat) and Commandments are infinite and cannot be fully interpreted even if all the trees were made into pens, and all the wide Oceans, multiplied seven times, were made into ink.²⁷ Thus, the art of calligraphy, which reflects on the earthly plane the writing God's Words upon the Guarded Tablet, is considered as the origin of the plastic arts. The Qur'anic calligraphy owes its genesis to the Islamic revelation and in reality; it is the response of the soul of the Muslims to the Divine Message.²⁸

In the field of decorative arts too Muslim artists used the art of writing as an important "ornamental" element to decorate the different religious and non-religious structures as well as to beautify many things of decoration such as cloth, paper, utensils, wood, rubber and glass material etc., on which the Words or *Ayat* (verse) of the Holy Qur'an are written, engraved or embossed. The aim of these artists or craft workers was to be passionate about the One Supreme Reality and enrich their spiritual power: Another branch of Moslem decorative art is that of ornamental writing, which is so often utilized with remarkable effect in the adornment of mosques, mausolea, and palaces, where whole chapters of the Koran are carved or inlaid round domes and minarets, doors and arches, testifying to the same religious earnestness, yet in a purely monotheistic spirit, as the pictures of saints and martyrs which decorate Christian churches.²⁹

Architecture is another Islamic art-form which is also considered as the most important feature of Islamic art. Broadly speaking, it is the hall-mark of Islamic art-tradition. The superiority of the Muslims in the field of architecture requires no commentary for this art-form still inspires the non-Islamic artists and evokes the admiration of modern world of architecture. Muslim architecture owed its significant unity to a religious faith and a perennial way of life. In the sacred architecture of Islam, Mosque comes first. Mosque or in Arabic *Masjid* literally means a place of *Sujud* or 'prostration'. It is a house of worship wherein the *Mu'min* (perfect man) communicates with his Master – Allah.³⁰

The mosque is the main religious structure of Islam .usually situated in a Muslim city, village or town. According to one *hadith* (tradition): "A person of faith in a mosque is like the sun reflecting in the water."³¹ While praying in the Mosque (or a similar sacred place) man finds himself away from this corporeal world and, for sometime, absorbs himself in God. In this stage of mental contemplation there exists nothing but Allah. Thus, this spiritual connection or the inward religious experience originates in excessive love of the Divine Being. It is here in the sacred atmosphere of the mosque that the *Mu'min* is lost in his object of love i.e. (Allah) and that he loses sight of everything else. Hence, it is this sacred architecture (*Masjid*) which provides the spiritual connection with Allah and is therefore considered an important form of Islamic art. It has a spiritual significance in the lives of Muslims. Besides the mosque, there are other sacred structures like *madrasas*, (schools), tombs over the graves of *Walis* or *Sufis* which are called *zayat* (tombs) and so on, which have spiritual importance. Generally, tombs provide some .of the most striking examples of Islamic architecture and these have a religious identity as well. We have some famous Islamic tombs and mosques in Alhambra (Spain), in Makkah, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and in India at Agra, Ajmer, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Bihar, Srinagar and some other parts of the sub continental. There are still other examples of Muslim architecture in the shape of 'palaces', large fortified rest houses along trade routes, hospitals, forts, market streets or bazaars (in Arabic called (*sooks*) and so on.

Though these are not included in sacred architecture yet they have their own religio-cultural importance. Overall, it is observed that Islamic architecture (both sacred and non-sacred) has a radiant cultural history and owns its extraordinary unity to a religious faith. Islamic architecture is, in many ways, a self-explanatory one and this architecture, as rightly remarked by Hossein Nasr, depends mostly upon the grace of issuing from the Qur'anic revelation which has made the correspondence in Islam between sacred architecture and natural world possible. Moreover, Prophet Muhammad's grace is equally a powerful source of inspiration to strengthen this unique communication. Muslim artists created and still create it only because it is, for them, a primordial source of spiritual enrichment.³²

In Islamic world of architecture, we find about eight main traditions: four major and four minor. The major ones include the Arab, the Iranian, the Turkish and the Indian and Pakistan the minor ones are, the West African, the East African, the Indonesian and the Chinese. Each one of these, in course of time, developed its own variants. Generally, the mosque or *madrassa* (theological college) or any other religious structure was built under any of the above traditions, maintaining the spiritual connection between man and God. The most primordial sacred architecture of Islam is the Holy Ka'bah, ordained by Allah as the direction of prayers (especially *Namaz*). It is the *Qiblah* of Muslims. Mosques and other religious structures as well are designed keeping in view the 'direction' of *Ka'bah* which is the centre point of Islamic *Ummah* (community) and around which Muslim pilgrims circumambulate and towards which the believers of Islam turn in their faces for daily prayers. The aim of every sacred piece of architecture lies in placing man in the presence of the Divine and enriching his spiritual moorings. Besides these forms of Islamic art, music and Sufi poetry also proved themselves to be a prominent source of spiritual message. The Sufi orders in Persia and India can be seen clearly to have their close connection with this composition of Islamic art which remained highly 'contemplative' and 'spiritual'.

Sufism is an important spiritual movement that has its significant role on Islamic art. In one way or the other, Sufi tradition remained a constant source of inspiration for all Islamic arts during the different periods of Muslim history. The influence of Sufism on different art-forms, particularly poetry, provided enough religious and spiritual enlightenment to many Muslims architects, miniaturists, calligraphists, and musicians of different Muslim dynasties. These artists tried to understand and underline the spiritual significance of their creative products.³³ Sufi poetry, developed especially on Iranio-Indian soils, has in itself the spiritual element as dominant force. The Persian poetry (along with music) reflects a 'spiritual style' the message of which is related to the Islamic Revelation. Persians consider their language too as 'sacred' because it was born during the early Islamic period and therefore, had great degree of freedom to convey the message of the Qur'an in its true spirit.³⁴

In Islamic world of art and culture, the Persian poetry is remarkable for its spiritual depth and sweep. The famous Persian poets like Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi, Hafiz Shirazi, Sa'adi Shirazi, Farid al-Din Attar, Jami, Awhadi Kirmani, Hatif, 'Abd al-Krim al-Jili, Shaikh Muhamud Shabistari, Sanai, Asphahani, etc. mainly composed Sufi poetry. According to these poets poetry is the result of the imposition of spiritual and Intellectual principles upon the matter or substance of language. In reality, poetry bears an intellectual and spiritual message. A message of love to God and His creatures, service to humanity and a feeling of universal brotherhood of mankind. Highlighting the importance of Sufi poetry, Seyyed Hossein Nasr refers to the Persian Sufi poet 'Abd al-Rahman Jami, who defined it in the following words:

What is poetry? The song of the bird of the intellect
 What is poetry? The similitude of the world of eternity.
 The value of the bird becomes evident through it.
 And one discovers whether it comes from the oven of a bath "house or a rose garden.
 It composes poetry from the Divine rose garden:
 It draws its power and sustenance from that sacred precinct.³⁵

The Persian mystical poetry in general is monistic in character that considers the Infinite Being as the Ocean of existence from which the waves of phenomena arise only to sink back again into it and their being and non-being is identical. Persian poet Farid has beautifully explained the relation of Unity of multiplicity:

In the Universe if you see even a thousand phenomena, to the men of faith they are One, like
 the book with separate parts when you turn its leaves and look it is One (in meaning)³⁶

In Islamic culture, poetry is an art-medium through which the poet expresses his entire gamut of emotions as well as his spiritual relationship to the Ultimate Reality.

Music is another important aspect of Sufi poetry. It is also considered as sacred art in Islamic culture. No discussion about Islamic art and spirituality can be completed without taking into account the importance of music.

The recitation of the Qur'an in an enchanting manner, the call to prayer (*al-adhan*), the singing of the poem (*Na'at*) for the Prophet Muhammad, presenting a funeral song (*Marthia*) in a downhearted manner on the heartbreaking events of the tragedy of Karba'a, and the *qawwalis* (or *Sama'*) which are vocal musical performances with instrumental accompaniment in which the chanting of Sufi poetry plays a pivotal role etc., all generate blissful ineffable and inscrutable states of spiritual enlightenment and ontogenetic plenitude. The spiritual states evoked by the classical Persian music are closely related to the spiritual states (*ahwal*) of the Sufis, and through Sufi-tradition to the spirit of the Holy Scripture (The Qur'an).³⁷

Seyyed Hossein Nasr refers to Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi, who founded a Sufi order, which is well-known for celebrating musical and dancing sessions (the *Mawlawis*), could openly say:

The musician began to play before the drunken Turk,
Behind the veil of melody the mysteries of the eternal covenant between God and Man.³⁸

Maulana Rumi points out that music has a diminishing impact. It is a source of ecstasy. Ecstasy or its equivalent word *fana* (annihilation of self) finds prominent mention in the Sufi-tradition. It is the way to union with Allah. The *sama'*, which is a primordial source of it (*fana* or *Wisal*), literally means "Audition". However, here in Rumi's Sufism *sama'* includes music, singing and dancing.³⁹ The spiritual music (*sama'*) plays a very significant role in the context of ecstasy according to Maulana Rumi. To him music induced mental collectedness and intensifies the flame of love (*'Ishq*). It is in reality, the food of lovers of God.⁴⁰

The great Islamic personalities especially philosophers, mathematicians, physicians and Sufis were well-versed in the field of music and its different theories. Al-Farabi (a Turk), Ibn Sina (a Persian) and Safi al-Din Urmawi were famous authorities in musical theory. There were some great Muslim physicians who used music to cure ailments of both body and soul. Several books were written concerning the therapeutic aspect of music.⁴¹ In Indian and Western music we also find such examples of treatment of diseases. In the Islamic world the supreme purpose of music is to invoke in man the element of spiritual correspondence with the Divine. Poetry has constantly been an inseparable part of music throughout the Islamic history. In both Arabic and Persian literatures we find such an intimate relationship. At present not only Arabic and Persian but also the other languages like Turkish, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, Hindi, Sindhi etc. are suffused with Sufi poetry in addition to being instrumental in highlighting the socio-political and historico-cultural aspects of human life.

Without going into further details on other aspects of music and its acceptability to the Islamic world, it can confidently be said that music is an important medium of communication with the Highest Reality. In music, there are a hundred thousand joys of which (with the help of one of which) one can cut across a thousand years of the path of attaining the gnosis (*Ma'rifat*) of Allah in a way that cannot be achieved by any Gnostic through any form of worship. The lover (*Ashiq*), while listening to spiritual music, finds that his soul or self is present before the Divine, the Truth (*al-Haqq*).⁴² The *Sama'* or spiritual music, in brief, is the audition and vision of Divine presence (*hudur*). It is the stimulant of spiritual mysteries. It is wonder in wonder. In that world canons or laws cease to exist and words fail to explain its content.⁴³ The litterateur becomes ignorant and the lover is annihilated. In this significant sacred art-form all these states are to be found and there are many unheard of by any methodologically informed philosophical encapsulation of art. Besides calligraphy, architecture, poetry and music there are several other kinds of Islamic arts such as miniature painting (especially book-illustration), and decorative arts which include: carpet art (rugs), textile art, metal ware art, ceramics or the art of pottery, glassware art, book-illumination, book-binding, wood-carving, the art of making beautiful jewelry and so on. Mostly Iran has long been famous for the development of almost all these Islamic art-forms and decorative arts:

Since early antiquity the Persians have proved themselves masters of decorative designs and colour. Through their efforts, the industrial arts of Islam attained a high degree of excellence.⁴⁴

All the above mentioned and many more creative works of Islamic artists indebted to the Islamic spirituality do provide psychological satisfaction to the beholder (the artist or *mu'min*).⁴⁵

One main distinction between Islamic art and non-Islamic one is that the creation of the former is not meant for luxury like mostly that of the latter. The Islamic art has a spiritual significance and, therefore, its message is also unique in character. It delves deep into human self to establish its spiritual relationship with the Deity. Islamic art has its own inner meaning, symbolism, esthetical, metaphysical and cosmological significance. There are some Muslims, who have little realization of Islamic spirit and Islamic art and who blindly endorse mostly the modern Western View that art and beauty are created and meant for luxurious life. These persons do not see the spiritually penetrative aspect of Islamic art the source of which is Allah, the Beautiful (*Jamil*). What happens in reality, when they consider art and beauty as a luxury, "they forget that their attitude has nothing to do with the Islamic one which considers beauty to be a Divine Quality, God is beautiful (*al-Jamil*) and therefore, He loves beauty."⁴⁶

Islamic art touches upon every aspect of human life and its every form is an echo of *mu'min's* soul which undoubtedly establishes its spiritual relationship with the Supreme Creator of everything that relates to aesthetics. A Muslim artist or craft-worker while writing "a World of Allah in beautiful calligraphic form or producing a piece of fine carpet using attractive colour scheme or preparing a miniature painting from Sa'adi's *Gulistan* or from Bayunghur's *Qisas al-Anbiya* (History of the Prophets) or from the Shah Namah (Anthology) of Iskandra Sultan like View of Makkah with the Holy Place and the Ka'bah (Shiraz, 1411), or from *Halft Awarang* of Jami, especially Yusuf and Zulaikha⁴⁷ (rightly a depiction of the Prophet Yusuf's story mentioned in the Holy Qur'an) etc. or composing Sufi-poetry and music or portraying natural objects in his creative activity like arabesque or constructing a religious structures like mosque etc. etc., in "all these and thousand other modes of activity he always finds Allah's Presence, His Grace and Love and a spiritual enthusiasm of creativity. The Muslim aesthetician and creative artist equates his every moment spent in the creation of any Islamic art form as prayer (*tbadat*) in which man's soul communicates God and acknowledges His Presence everywhere."⁴⁸

Islamic art has a major significance from the point of view of the Islamic religion itself, observing that every form of art is inextricably bound to convey the Islamic message. God is the Paragon of Beauty and every art and thought originated from Him. He is a Creator and Sustainer of everything. He creates things out of nothing by a sheer act of His will. He is the Greatest *Musawwir* (Artist), (*Musawwir* is one of the names of Allah), Who creates Matter as well as form to design things, to colour them so that they look beautiful in keeping with the aesthetic sense of man (the Vicegerent of Allah). Therefore, the sacred art of the Islam is a gift from Heaven full of *barakah*. In every sense, this art is a blessing issuing ultimately from the Divine Mercy *al-Rahmah*.⁴⁹ In modern world of scientific and technological advancement, man has got everything except mental satisfaction. His soul is in crisis. It is the Islamic art in its universal sense which can virtually provide this psychical contentment in present world of corruption, misery and nuclear race where the respect and dignity of man have become non-existent and where moral, religious and spiritual values have become meaningless. Even in this age it is Islamic art which has a powerful source of inspiration in every aspect of human life. This sacred art of Islam is fortunately a most precious gift of Allah for the Muslims as well as for all those people who are sensitive to the revivifying power of beauty (Jamal) as it is wedded to the Truth (*Haq*).⁵⁰

We shall have to re-discover the sacred esthetical tradition of Islamic art, which possesses a spiritual significance. It has a unique message to convey. A message which inculcates in man a deep sense of love and sympathy for the creatures of God, a profound acknowledgment of the gifts of Allah who has bestowed on man the power of wisdom, freedom and creativity, a yearning to adore God for His mercy to man in bringing forth his creative activity in right direction, a sense of understanding the teleological as well as the spiritual aspect of human life, an inspiring force of free action, an ability to know the secrets of the Self and the like. In the strict sense, Islamic art has emerged from the Highest Beauty - the One (Allah), Who is the source of, everything. It is a means to attain that End which is Truth, Majesty and Beauty as well.⁵¹

Briefly, the art of Islam is Islamic art not because it was created by Muslims but because it issues forth from the Islamic revelation as do the Divine Law and the Way. This art crystallizes in the world of forms the inner realities of Islamic revelation, and issues from the inner dimension of Islam revealing to man the Ultimate *Sanctum-Sanctorum* of Divine Revelation. In brief, Islamic art is a fruit of Islamic spirituality from the point of view of its genesis and as an aid. It is a complement and supports for the spiritual life from the vantage point of realization or return to the origin the *summum bonum* of human life. The independence and originality of Islamic art can directly be traced from its specific world-view. There is an indispensable relation between the Islamic revelation and Islamic art. God is the source of all and He is the Knower of all things. Therefore, the Essence or Forms of all things have their reality in the Divine Intellect.

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