

THE PERCEPTION OF 'MALANG' AND ITS INFLUENCE ON VISUAL ARTS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The current study is around "Malangs" which can be explained as somebody who doesn't greatly upkeep about his environments, somebody who is not sophisticated while living in this biosphere. The main objectives of the study are digging into the historical evolution of Malang and its related ideas. Furthermore, explaining the general perception of Malang through the lens of literature as well as looking around the local areas including various shrines in Lahore. Last but not the least, to explore that how Pakistani artists perceive malangs and portray them in their work? In this exploratory research, the data was gathered through convenient sampling method. The semi structured interviews were conducted with malangs because they could provide rich information about the topic. The methodology helped to analyze data about various life aspects of malangs including cultural, spiritual, social impacts. Various themes emerged from the interviews conducted which revealed that the malangs retain a complete dominance in obscure knowledge and irrational powers amid these classes. It was concluded that the contemporary world doesn't brand much logic to them, therefore, they signify an endless and primeval spiritual world. **Keywords**

Abandonment, Cultural Code, Visual influencer, Artistic preference.

Introduction

The current study is around such type of people generally termed as "Malangs". The term "malang" can be cast-off in Urdu, Punjabi, and apparently is likewise used in Afghani and even Persian, which perhaps is the origin for the word. Malang is somebody who doesn't greatly upkeep about his environments, somebody who is not sophisticated while living in this biosphere. The Malang nowadays is a mystical cultural countenance that signifies a vigorous facet of the local culture and faith. Malangs are one of the famous characters in the life cycle of villages and cities in Pakistan and can be recognized through their peculiar look which includes, lengthy hair, their meandering matted beards (Trivial as well as clean shaven) and their beanies. Rings carved with stones of different shapes and colors can be seen in their right hands and occasionally both. Adorning their costumes, they attire in colorful clothes and some have religious trinkets and panels of prayer signs. However, others wear on long bamboo poles, colored trio ribbons either black or red.

The term Malang varies from one field to another with relevance to the connotation. At

one point of time, the term is used to denote haunted lunatics, religious mendicants or beggars, hashish addicts, nomadic Sufis. This article is about the type of people which are recognized as Malangs. They can be seen in various societies and groups but we cannot document or demonstrate delineated school of thought. There is arbitrarily recognizable pyramid of certain malangs among the scattered who are called gurus. This pyramid is quite well defined within the different societies. We can easily find the malangs near shrines of Sufi saints like at the tomb of Data Ganj Bakhsh in Lahore, in Punjab Province and the famous tomb of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar at Sehwan, in Sindh Province. They are typically found in huts next to the tombs of these saints. Following a spiritual path, they are apparently those beggars who have left all the materialistic things in the world for the sake of spiritualism.

They also accomplish certain self-proclaimed spiritual meanings such as the fascinating care of a small celebratory of a lesser-known saint; paying respect to shrines of the saints; practicing magic; often known to have the powers to heal the sick; the capability to answer the evil magic etc. On the other side, these malangs are known for taking care of the trivial memorials and small tombs of the saints which are usually located in the deprived areas in the cities. The malangs perform various tasks at the tombs for example cleaning, maintaining the decorum, lighting the lamps etc. Infrequently he bends to the guests and asks for support.

This naive way of rationalizing readily classifies the specific arrivals of the Malangs with all the sacredness they can convey. This study argues that malangs are in fact a powerful indicator because they adopt this simple and recognizable shape. Instead of their spiritual opinions, they carry a multifaceted cultural code and exemplify meaningful values usually known as the residues of the sacred. Some of the Qalandars are believed to carry with them unfamiliar and strange expressions.

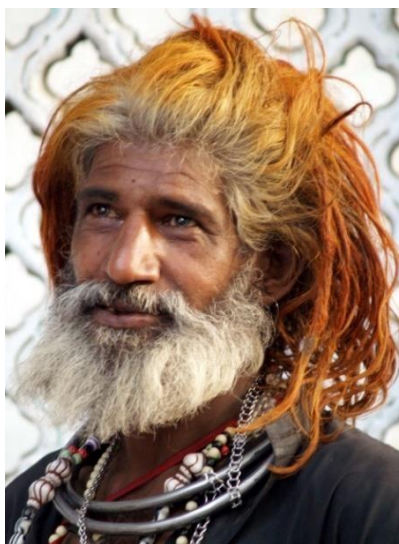


Fig: 1 Malang at Data Darbar

They as a matter of fact try to give a threatening and terrifying personality. They claim to have certain powers through which they can counter mystic activities and practice magic. Nevertheless, they symbolize a facet of religious beliefs and worship even what is imprinted in holy scripture. There was a connection between magic and religion in old times. History depicts those ancient rulers like Druids, Pharaohs have magic powers. This is the reason that groups like gypsies etc. even in modern era are believed to know and practice horrible magical tricks for which general public get a frightening image of such isolated people including malangs. For dealing with

daily life troubles, health issues, people frequently call such people who can help them through their magical abilities to handle those day-to-day problems. These malangs will take inaudibly the food or financial aid offered by such patients, however, they don't prescribe.

The malangs convey the three chief colors which are red, green and yellow through display of their spiritual art. The following are the exact comments of Ewing (1983) on the topic of malangism:

“... walking from one shrine to another staying in one place for different lengths of

time: sometimes only a few days, sometimes for longer periods of time during such stays they may serve some pir or deceased saint at his shrine. Large, prominent shrines often have their own retinue of malangs, who come and go even if they lodge there, so majavars (the caretakers

Therefore, red color has an imagery importance for the malangs. One of the questions to be answered through the study at hand is that how the malangs are able to encompass a dominant system in the local civilization? Another thing which will have to be answered through this study. Therefore, it is necessary to study that what type of connotations do the malangs convey through these charming religious oddments of writing as well as their role in connecting a specific type of message.

The views of the malangs are made from the mystical and elated form of adoration. The rituals of conventions are not drag out by them. They get rid of precautionary principles in both religion and civilization. Understanding is sought out with their devotion. Normally these malangs intake heavy doses of narcotics as an inspiration to be part of their reverence as well to reach greater level of spiritualism. Social issue or ethics are not their problem in all this. Furthermore, this intoxication provokes them to be efficient in their various spiritual activities including choirs, dancing, drumbeats etc. Moreover, it is a profound elaboration of their marvelous works, which must generally be regarded as genuine. However, while these drugs make them crazy and more motivated, they can also make them terrifying. Although intoxicating through divine contemplation is a real additional feature of their sacred practice, this use of sedatives is only one aspect of malang.

The knowledge gained during field training at this internship is important to me. One day I gave money to a malang and he threw it away. This was not for the first time and it was a sign that the amount being offered was not enough, though, it proved wrong as when I increased the offered amount, it was not welcomed. The malang which looked helpless got furious at this act. This depicts that there are certain types of malangs which can easily get into an incomprehensible non-sense. There are certain types of malangs which are taken by foolish people as their divine saviour from the evil spirits as such malangs are considered to be bestowed with special spiritual powers which enable them to deal with such type of evil spirits. The reason is that there are such people which are in psychological distress and they consider such type of malangs. Such people are in so much psychological distress do that they don't hesitate to contact such malangs which themselves have unintelligible ways to communicate. However, there exists such class of malangs as well who communicate their opinion in a very gentle and logical way and they have balanced and humble personalities. These type of malangs give care to the visitors and influence them with their piousness and spiritualism.

An ethnographical study technique was implemented to study and deduce the captured painterly data. This research scheme is modified and working in the attainment of data regarding local distinctiveness and acumen in dissimilar units, both in municipal and countryside areas. According to Fetterman (2018), researchers consider it an important data gathering instrument.

This study unrestricted the means of participant reflection and logged without troubling the advancement of the consultations “in order to mitigate the effect on the behavior of the participants. The area from where the data was collected comprised of areas located in Lahore including Data Darbar which is well known as the main commemorative in the entire South Asia. These are relics of Ali Hujwiri, popularly known as Data Ganj Baksh, an 11th-century Sufi saint from the Ghazni province of Afghanistan. This place is considered the holiest place in Lahore and receives thousands of visitors every day. The data was gathered in the form of pictures and interviews carried out live with the malangs. The malangs and their followers were interviewed and the main conclusions of this study had been grounded on these.

Malangs, on the other side, take the responsibility to look after the shrines themselves. These shrines are located normally at the lower-class occupied side of the city. In addition, malangs light the oil lamps as well as keep them maintained. They receive donations and other funds from the visitors in the shape of begging and spent them in the maintenance of the small tombs and shrines. According to the study of Frembgen (2009), a famous ethnographer and anthropologist termed these saints as “Friends of God”. The dynasty of malangs come from the urban and rural areas of Pakistan as well as they are found in South Asia and Central Asia. They were eminent by their clothing and demeanor to clearly display what they are. These so called “Friends of God” have such appearance that the people somehow recognize them spiritually near to God.



Fig: 2 Oil on Canvas (24"x36")

In order to create an out of the box work of art, the topic of Sufi saints has remained very popular among the painters. The malangs had been the centre of attention in the past as well as the contemporary art work and the painters had been painting the famous Muslim Suffi saints as evident from the manuscripts which belonged to 14th and 15th centuries. The malangs have gained popularity over the years due to the colorful appearance in which they tend to spend their routine

life. We can experience such portraits of these saints in the work of modern-day artists like of Muhammad Ali Bhatti, who is living in USA now-a-days and as depicted in figure 3. In spite of being not a mass productive genre, the portraits of malangs have been popular in the highest cadre of modern contemporary iconographical culture. Yet, this is also true that these paintings are not so majestic or powerful as being considered by their devotees. The fact is that the purpose of making these portraits had never been for the sake of these followers' interest for meeting some spiritual requirements for adoration. On the contrary, the main objective to make these paintings is for selling purpose to those who can afford these i.e. the rich class.



Fig:3 Acrylic on Canvas 75”X90” by Khalid Khan Khaay

There are basically three colors namely red, yellow and green that are pre-dominant in this religious art that being carried by the malangs. Likewise, Shahbaz Qalandar, who belongs to Sehwan (Sindh), had been associated with red color. More broadly speaking, as we hear the name of Shahbaz Qalandar, the red color by the title of “lal” immediately comes to the mind as he has been popular for being associated with this color for centuries and has become part of the rich culture of that area, Sehwan. It is believed that he used to attire in red color. It is also said that while in the elated state of mind, eyes of this saint, Shahbaz Qalandar, tend to become red (Mokhtar 2012 15).

On the occasion of the urs of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, the malangs as well as followers gather at the shrine from all over of Pakistan attire in red and embellish their automobiles in red flags. Hence, it is evident that red color, as a symbol of spiritualism, is of prime importance for the malangs.

Motivation

I have sort of nostalgic attachment with malangs because when I used to visit various shrines with my grandmother in childhood, I always interact with them and fascinated by their apparels and suspicious behavior. I always wondered about that where that people come from and what actually they want. Why they are not living like a normal human being. Life is a gift of God then why these people get separate their selves from all the blessings. I observed that different people treat this class of society differently. It creates more interest for me to know about them. Are they Sufis but with the passage of time, I just busy in my studies and routine work and didn't reveal the truth. I oftenly study about them but not exactly. So, I got this opportunity in my MS to research about them.

Being an art student, I studied and experienced art work/exhibitions regarding malangs but not in the way as I actually wanted to be. I want to study in my research to gain a deeper understanding of their historical background, philosophical aspects, and its impact on the field of Art. This academic exploration can encompass various disciplines, including religious studies, anthropology, sociology, history, and philosophy. It involves practices aimed at self-discovery, inner transformation, and a deepening of one's spiritual connection.

I want to reveal the truth that how this class influence the artists and visual artists are creating paintings, drawings, or sculptures depicting Malangs engaged in mystical practices, such as ecstatic dancing, meditation, or other spiritual rituals. These artworks can capture the mysticism and spirituality associated with Malangs. In any case, the influence of Malang in visual arts often revolves around themes of mysticism, spirituality, and the pursuit of a deeper connection with the divine, making it a rich source of inspiration for artists across various mediums and periods.

Objectives

- Historical evolution of Malang and its related ideas.
- General Perception of Malang.
- How Pakistani artists perceive malangs and portray them in their work.

Methodology

Qualitative ethnographic research method has been adopted to analyze and interpret the visual data that we photographed. This research technique is convenient and effective in obtaining data regarding local phenomenon and particularities in different regions, both in the urban and rural. The data presented in this study was collected through convenient sampling in the Punjab over a period of one year between 2022-2023 through series of field works. This gave us a unique opportunity to familiarize ourselves with this adjunct of Sufism. We conducted ethnographic surveys in the suburbs of the cities of Lahore and some villages where we could encounter wandering malangs. We have collected data in the form of photographs and conducted interviews.

The findings of this study are based on the original interviews of both malangs and the people who venerate them and visual artists as well. This study depicts the interpretation of this

divine sector of civilization. The ethnographic study brings into lime light the today's malangs appearance, e.g., the intriguing clothes they wear, the profligate jewels they attire and cultic practices they stroll from one place to another and how they influence us in the field of Art.

The malangs can be found in the city ways of the subcontinent and alike spaces. They have an image of an incomprehensible familiarity. They did not meet the morals of public conduct so there is some thin area of emotive exploitation to them for the reason that they are the figures who are distant to social abominations, communal tensions and occupation. This study enabled me to closely look at this sector of the society known as malangs with Sufism. Except Qadriyya sect which connects back to Hazrat Abu Bakar (RA), most of the Sufi schools can be trailed to Hazrat Ali (RA). That is the reason of Shia malangs showing themselves connected to Hazrat Ali (RA). Sunni malangs links themselves to the Sufism just like the Shia malangs. This study presented many challenges out of which inquiry into the understanding of the philosophies of the malangs was the most difficult one. It can be inferred that these malangs philosophically relate themselves to be connected with these well known and respected Sufi saints. One of the panelists from the lower class has this to say:

“... I am the disciple (chela) of Ali Hujwiri. He is my spiritual master. My master spreads light in all directions. Those who come under this light and get what they want in their material life. I pray for the people to follow the path of Data Darbar.

The insolence of the uneducated panellist above aided me comprehend the phenomenon of the adoration of saints which has bottomless roots in our occupant Sufi attitude. This unexperienced way of discerning keenly distinguishes the distinguishing initiation of malangs with the blessedness they can distinguish. Studies sustenance that malangs are truly a powerful signifier due to this straightforwardly recognizable advent. They convey with them a multilayered social cipher in the name of their mystical views and signify significant standards and what we would interpret to the froth of the sacred.

The behavior of malangs is an essential characteristic, as this is what classifies them. With several attachments: the outfit becomes an elongated shawl, handcuffs, jewelry, bracelets, etc.; any amount of droplet-shaped artifact; they bring a wooden or metal bone bowl which they place on their shoulder. They regularly wear taweez and often wear heavy ornaments decorated with stones on their limbs. They generally trust the childish powers these semi-gems would possess. They occasionally carry a ornamental metal ax for defence during their journeys and this weapon may also designate a achievement they have confidence in to consume over a djinn or paranormal entity. Frembgen throws light on the costumes of malangs as follows:

“...the malangs belonging to various brotherhood has its specific costume, differentiated from one another in the form, material and colors of the clothing and items of equipment. Special attributes that distinguish the malang from a simple fakir or lowest rank malang also vary depending on the brotherhood. Above all, followers of heterodox brotherhoods dress in bizarre and imaginative manners. They also shave their head and beard and others keep long, scraggly and unkempt beards. This tangled hair of some mystics, which is never cut, is considered a sign of renunciation of the world and holiness. One of the most important components of the malang costume is a long

The get-up of malangs is a significant feature, meanwhile it is what classifies them. Nowadays they wear characteristic colourful costumes, plus those of red, black and yellow or occasionally blue. With approximately fittings: the clothing will be a extended clothing, handcuffs, charms, chains, etc; pearl made ornaments; The malangs dangle over their berm through coveying a ligneous or metal bowl. They have worn various kinds of jewels on different parts of body for example on neck, arms, fingers. They also wore some kind of taweezes thought to be sacred ones protecting them from the evil. They are also believed to have gullible powers through which they are supposed to handle anyone through semi-precious gravels on a being. Another decorative metal machete assumed to have for self-defense can be seen with these malangs during their travel. This ornament may also be used as an indication of some win over evil powers like any paranormal activity or a djinn.

One of our interviewees explained:

“...one of my neighbors had been suffering from mirgi (epilepsy) and medicines could not cure him. Then he met a wandering malang who performed some rituals over him and told him some totkey (short religious formulas).

Fanatism is not supported in Islam. The existence of malangs appease radicalism which indicates acentric beliefs. Malangs still live in rural and inferior class areas which depicts that they have no space in this contemporary world even in the times of communal structure of society. Consequently, the malangs rather than being known as the guardians as spiritual consultants like maulvis, feature a minute form of mystical obedience. The malangs are not known to be having some kind of intellect in the modern world. They have been characterized to be signified as a rude and spiritual limitless character.

An ethnographic study method was cast-off to analyze and infer the snapped painterly data. This research method is suitable and operative for gaining data on local marvels. According to Fetterman (2018), it is a vital tool for assembling data. In order to minimize the effect on the behavior of the participants, this research uses charming notes and observing the participants which will result in normalizing the flow of discussion (Fetterman 2010, 61). Through this technique the researcher was able to get acquaintance with norms of Sufism. Through this study, the researcher was able to ran the ethnographical surveys from the wandering malangs near the Data Ganj Baksh tomb. The data collection was in the form of snaps and interview. The malangs and their followers were the people on whom outcomes of this study were grounded.

More than anything else, in a altering world, malangs are the powerful descriptors due to their unswervingly distinguishable advent and the countless items they transmit about their character featuring a multifaceted enlightening code of a way of life spiritual in nature. In a husk, malangs are classified as retarded, murky drug addict, deprived and wrecked by the people who visit the durbars. It can be easily said that the modern world has no real value for them. But, the malangs are to be considered the torch bearers of the ancient religious extremes which nowadays wander in the streets of the cities, acting as custodian of the Sufi tradition.

Type / Nature of Research

This research needs to be explored by Phenomenological approach. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand and describe the universal essence of a phenomenon. I am interested in the exploration of consciousness, subjective realities, and the essence of human experiences may be drawn to phenomenology. This approach seeks to uncover the essence or underlying structure of a phenomenon.

Data will be collected through mixed method approach. In depth understanding approximately 50 respondents will complete structured questionnaires, provide quantitative data. Approximately 3 visual artists will be interviewed to gather qualitative insights.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will employ both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential tests to identify patterns and correlators. Qualitative data from interviews will undergo thematic analysis to extract meaningful themes and patterns. Integration of both types of data will provide a holistic understanding of the research questions.

Conclusion

Malangs can be well-thought-out as recluses nomadic in villages, towns and community places. They are deprived in two conducts: first, they are disallowed by usual religion; subsequent, they reject civilization. Consequently, they exist on the peripheries of society, abided rather than acknowledged. Though, as it is a century-old establishment, they are treasured by numerous. Islam, alike other faiths, inclines towards radicalism.

The existence of Malangs in sacred loops is a indicator of unconventional views which, by their very occurrence, alleviate extremism. But, when it comes to social edifice, Malangs are out of dwelling in the current world, but these individuals still have an impression on the inferior classes and rural zones. In the central and inferior classes, beliefs are more conservative and connected to social norms and the ambitions of the mohallah (neighbourhood).

Thus, malangs signify a lesser form of sacred adherence rather than being protectors of spiritual consultant like maulvis. The cogency of the views they embody is outlined, though they are normally more valued among supporters of Sufi saints. So far they retain a complete dominance in obscure knowledge and irrational powers amid these classes. The inferior and rural classes, without lessening the normal spiritual cogency of views and sources of expert witness, more willingly accept the malangs for what they represent and trust in their credulous powers and incomprehensible canon without finding a contradiction. The contemporary world doesn't brand much logic to them. Therefore, they signify a endless and primeval spiritual world.

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