It has been said that Islam may be regarded both as the religion founded by Mohammad and as a way of life which has shown itself capable of absorbing and reconciling peoples of the most diverse origins. Islam began in Mecca about A.D. 610. The dominant religion of Arabia at this time was a form of the old Semitic religion, with shrines of various Gods and Goddesses in many places. Mohammad was born in Mecca around the year A.D. 570. It was in about 610 that he came to believe that he was receiving messages from God which he was to convey to his fellow Meccans. These messages were later collected and formed the sacred book, the Quran. They asserted that God was One (Allah) and that he was merciful and all-powerful controlling the course of events. On the Last Day he would judge people according to their acts and assign them to heaven or hell. In the revelations, Muhammad himself was spoken of sometimes as merely a warner telling of God’s punishment for sinners, sometimes as a prophet or messenger of God. Muhammad sincerely believed that these were not his own composition, but were the actual speech of God conveyed to him by an angel. This is still the belief of Muslims. Muhammad gained a number of followers, who met frequently with him and joined him in worship of God. There was also a widespread belief in a high god or supreme god, Allah. The other gods were regarded as angels, and could be asked to intercede with the supreme god on behalf of the worshippers. It began not among nomads but among city-dwellers engaged in far-flung commercial enterprises. Towards the end of 6th century the merchants of Mecca gained a monopoly of trade between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, which skirted the west coast of Arabia by camel caravan. Mecca had a sanctuary, the Ka‘ba, which

was an ancient pilgrimage centre, and the surrounding district was considered sacred. All this facilitated the growth of trade, but the wealth which poured into Mecca led to social tensions, especially among the younger men even as Mohammad also expected a generous use of wealth, for the welfare of all.

The Meccan merchants were roused to vigorous opposition by the criticism of their practices implied in the Quran. The merchants spoke of the old pagan Gods but Quran came to emphasize that there is only one God and that ‘there is no deity but God’. As opposition grew Muhammad’s followers were persecuted in various ways by his opponents. Eventually it became impossible for him to carry on his religious activity in Mecca and in 622, preceded by about 70 men and their families, he immigrated to Medina. This immigration, the Hijrah, became the event which marked the beginning of the Islamic era.217

Islam has two basic groups- the Sunni and Shi’i. Sunnism and Shiaism represent the major doctrinal varieties of Islam. Sufism denotes the inner spiritual life of both. According to the Sunnis no one could succeed Mohammad in his nature and quality as prophet, for the Quran finalized and perfected the revelation of divine guidance and declared Muhammad to be ‘the Seal of the Prophets’. Muhammad’s successor could therefore be no more than the guardian of the prophetic legacy. He would be caliph (khalifa) with subordinate authority as leader of the believers, having responsibility for the administration of community affairs in obedience to the Qur’an and prophetic precedent.218 Shi’i muslims believed that the principal figure of religious authority is the Imam. According to the Shia muslims Muhammad instituted ‘ the cycle of initiation’ for the continuing guidance of the community, by appointing as his successor an Imam. The first Imam was Ali, a cousin an adopted son and later son-in-law of Muhammad(by marriage to Fatima). The

218 Ibid p.363
Sufis are not a distinct group or sect; they are simply Muslims—Sunnis or Shi’as—who seek intimacy with God through a discipline of spiritual purification.  

In the Quran there is not a single interdiction against making sculptures and paintings of human beings and living things. But soon a strict stricture against the making of images began to be accepted as the philosophers and interpreters began to give different interpretation to the holy book gaining a large following. One of the traditionalists, Al Bukhari, gave an edict “the angels will not enter a house where there is a dog nor into one where there are images. On the day of resurrection the most terrible punishments will be inflicted on the painter who has imitated the beings created by God. He will say to that painter then: ‘Give life to these creations!’ ” Another traditionalist, Ibn Habel, says “Those whom Allah will punish most severely on the Day of Judgment will be the painters who imitate his creation.”

Muslim art thus was unwilling to fix immutably the fleeting image and bound to renounce realistic genres. Painting and sculpture could not be used to create faithful portraits lifelike representations of historical events, or accurate records of a ruler’s deeds. Attempts at realistic depiction would have constituted a blasphemous affront to the divine prerogative of creation. “The oft-mentioned prohibition of pictorial imagery in the Islamic world should however not be attributed to the Quran or to other pronouncement of a dogmatic nature. Rather, this prohibition was grounded in the very definition of the role of the arts within Islamic society”

Because of the wide acceptance of this belief during the early years no images from that period are available. However one of the

219 Ibid p. 365
222 Ibid p. 355
most significant form of Islamic arts did develop called calligraphy the art of decorative writing. An elaborate system for writing the script was evolved by Ibn Muqla the renowned artist calligrapher of the 10th century later called Kufic and Nastaliq. A new important element which exerted a powerful influence on decorative forms was the Arabic script. It lent itself easily to the formation of ever-new variations. The angular and massive character of Kufic script, as well as the round and readily changeable forms of Naskhi writing, were used both in the elaboration of monumental epigraphy and in the decoration of small household objects. The texts used in the decorative scheme of religious as well as secular buildings were for the most part taken from the Koran. In addition, words of acclamation and praise for the ruling prince and wishes for a blissful hereafter for the architect or the owner can also be found, often accompanied by dates.

In later years the decorative motifs evolved into some kind of abstract figural rendering. A characteristic treatment of figural motifs in Islamic art was to repeat them progressively within established ornamental bands. The sensitive artist did not treat the square or circle as unified surface within which a single major element must dominate; rather, figural motifs were more likely to be disposed around the periphery of the form or within bands repeated several times over the two-dimensional surface. The individual motif thus lost its independence through a seemingly endless repetition and no longer served as a form of visual attraction. The esthetic intention of this art is not conveyed by individual details but only in the grouping of the entire decorative field in which the details are submerged. There is however one manuscript that illustrates an extra important text - a lengthy version of the life of the Prophet (Siyar-i-Nabi) produced by a Turkish poet for a Mamluk Sultan in 14th century Cairo, but known in an illustrated version only from the late 16th century Istanbul. The paintings of this edition which seems to have been prepared in six volumes for Sultan Murat III
in 1594, are in the typical Ottoman court style of large figures in brilliantly coloured costumes, fine expressive faces, simple landscapes or highly decorative architectural interiors and an original and intensely pious quality that is truly remarkable.\textsuperscript{223} Many other themes were later introduced as well like, The meeting of Khusrau and Shirin in the desert and similar episodes from popular epics entered the repertory of the handicraft worker especially in Persia.\textsuperscript{224}

On the Indian subcontinent, Islam first appeared in the south western tip of the peninsula, in today's Kerala state although Arabs had trade relations with Malabar even before the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. In North India, Islamic rule came to the region in the 8th century, when Muhammad bin Qasim conquered Sindh, (Now Pakistan). Muslim conquests were expanded under Mahmud and the Ghaznavids until the late 12th century, when the Ghurids overran the Ghaznavids and extended the conquests in Northern India. Qutb-ud-din Aybak conquered Delhi in 1206 and thus began the reign of the Delhi Sultanates. In the 14th century, Alauddin Khilji extended Muslim rule south to Gujarat, Rajasthan and Deccan. Various other Muslim dynasties also formed and ruled across India from the 13th to the 18th century such as the Qutb Shahi and the Bahmani, but none rivaled the power and extensive reach of the Mughal Empire at its peak.

That Islamic calligraphy which was much appreciated had strong roots in India even before the Mughals as can be seen in the writings carved on the Kutb Minar and many others. The tradition of calligraphic writing, on paper, found its best proponent in Emperor Babur, himself a poet and calligrapher who invented the Khatt-e-Baburi script and also calligraphed a Quran which he sent as his offering to Mecca. There are many references to other calligraphers of the period, like the last

\textsuperscript{224} Kunnel, Ernst, "Islam," Encyclopedia of World Art, p.354, Vol. VIII, Italy
emperor, Bahadur Shah who was a talented calligrapher in several styles, especially Naskhi and Nastaliq.

Since mural painters were available in India and accordingly there is nothing surprising in the fact that murals often indirectly related to islam were often painted in palaces and in the mansions of the nobles and the affluent.\textsuperscript{225}Within religious sanctuaries, only indistinct hints of human or animal forms were tolerated, but in bathing establishments, and bedrooms etc, paintings of hunting or of love scenes for the entertainment of patrons seldom aroused objection. The available evidence show that the art of painting was treated merely as one of the decorative arts used for enlivening the blank surfaces of the bedroom walls.\textsuperscript{226}The first illustrated books begin to become available from the late Sultanate period i.e. roughly the 15thc.

Though references to mural painting during the Sultanate period indicate that it was a popular form of wall decoration, there is no evidence, literary or otherwise, of the presence illustrated manuscripts being patronized by the Sultanate rulers or their nobles or bibliophiles till the time of the Lodhis. It seems there was no large scale production of Islamic illustrated manuscripts before the Lodhi rule. Perhaps because the earlier Sultanate courts, where the art of calligraphy had already attained a high standard, they were prone to look to Persia and Central Asia for excellence in other fields as well. A few illustrated manuscripts may possibly have found their way to Sultanate India during the period extending from the late 13\textsuperscript{th} to the 15\textsuperscript{th}century. In Persia itself, during this period, the art of miniature illustration was

\textsuperscript{225}Khandalwala, Karl, ‘The Heritage of Islamic Art in India’, p.6.\textsuperscript{226}One of the example from the Sultanate period appears in Tarikh- i-Firoz Shahi of Afif, a contemporary of Firuz Tughliaq, who observes: “It is customary with the kings that their bedrooms are painted so that when alone with the women-folk they could see the paintings.” Sultan Firuz for fear of God issued the following order” These ateliers should not turn out pictures, as this is against the Islamic law. In the place of figural drawing floral decoration should be used. See Khandalwala, Karl, Chandra, Moti, New Documents of Indian Painting, p.5., Bombay, 1969

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highly valued but its production was limited. It was only in later times that the production become prolific.

In 1398 during the rule of Sultan Sikander Lodhi a cultural revival appears to have taken place. During his reign Hindus began to study Persian systematically. We also find the Khamsa of Amir Khusrau illustrated in all probability in the second half of the 15th century at Delhi itself where the popularity of the poet’s verses had remained unabated long after his death. and another illustrated manuscript of the Sikander Nama (eg. Discourse of the learned, Folio from an illustrated copy of Sikandar Nama, late 15th century AD.)227 We have an illustrated Hamza Nama also (eg. Hamza meeting a learned man, Folio from an illustrated copy of Hamza Nama, late 15th century AD.)228, dealing with the romantic adventures of Hamza, uncle of the Prophet Muhammad again probably painted at Delhi. However while Persian classics were being illustrated by Indian and itinerant Persian artists, so also Indian romances such as the Chandayan, popularly known as the Laur Chanda and the Chaura Panchisika etc. were illustrated.229 in which elements of the western Indian stylistic features appear intermixed. With a modification of the human form and the rejection of certain distinctive characteristics of the western Indian style like the farther projecting eye. The Persian characteristics are visible in a finer draughtsmanship and a broadening of the picture surface.

Mughal empire was founded by Babur in the early years of the 16th century. He was aesthetically a very sensitive person endowed with a keen eye to see and appreciate beauty. After the death of Babur Humayun succeeded him in 1530 and he spent all his early years in different political strifes till in 1540 he was driven away by Sher Shah Suri and sought exile in the court of Persia. His contact with the Persian

227 Khandalwala, Karl and Chandra Moti, NDIP, p.194.
228 Ibid, p.203
229 The dating of these works is highly contentious as the estimates range between the 15th and 16thC.
court, proved to be a turning point in the history of Indian painting under
the Mughals. Two artist Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd-al-Samad accompanied
Humayun. both of whom continued to work for Humayun first at Kabul
and later at Delhi . According to some art historians Humayun
commissioned these artist to start the illustration to Dastan of Hamza
while he was still at Kabul , and according to others the illustrations did
not commence till 1567.230 Thus in the reign of Akbar , the imperial court
apart from being the centre of administrative authority also emerged as
a centre of cultural excellence. Akbar’s love for painting as a means of
recognizing God as recorded by Abul Fazl in Ain –i-Akbari231 ,is clearly
reflected in his desire to arrive at a perfect style through an
amalgamation of Hindu, Jain and Persian features . Mir Sayyid Ali and
later Abd-al Samad headed this vast atelier. His catholicity of
temperament which understood and appreciated the basic principles of
various religions meant that he got a large number of texts translated
into Persian and got a few of them illustrated with beautiful miniatures
as evidenced from the illustrated manuscripts of Razm Namah and
Ramayana.232 Because of the catholicity of temperament of Akbar and
his striving to understand the basic concepts of various religions large
scale discussions were held in his court on the philosophies and basic
principles of various religions. Akbar inherited and expanded his father’s
library as also the atelier of court painters and paid close attention to its
output. Along with the treatment of texts like Ramayana and the
Mahabharata many Christian themes were also painted One of the best
known examples is that of Akbar visiting the Dargah ca. 1580-90.233 His
son Jahangir (1605-27) had an even deeper artistic inclination and
during his reign Mughal painting developed further. Brushwork became
finer the colors lighter and composition more elaborate. The paintings of

231 Ibid p.218
232 See chapter
233 Themes in Indian History, Part II, p.217. Text book in History for Class XII, National Council
Jahangir appear also to be imbued with a more philosophical outlook. Jahangir was also deeply influenced by European painting. He encouraged his royal atelier to take up the single point perspective favoured by European artists, unlike the flattened multi-layered style used in traditional miniatures. A large number of works in Islamic themes have also been recorded\textsuperscript{234} which true to the essentially philosophical temperament of the emperor deal extensively with Sufi and transcendental themes like Sufis dancing, visiting poets along with his own visits to various dargahs, as also a beautiful miniature of the Dargah of Moinuddin Chisti. There are a number of works of the 17\textsuperscript{th} c. which show Jahangir's encounters with holy men as also his visits to centres of pilgrimage, particularly Sufi as for instance a painting by Manohar that depicts his pilgrimage to the Moinuddin Chishti dargah at Ajmer. During the reign of Shah Jahan (1628-58) paintings continued to be painted, but they gradually became cold and rigid. These primarily included themes like musical parties; lovers, sometimes in intimate positions, on terraces and gardens; and very occasionally of ascetics gathered around a fire for example the painting of two Sufi saints sitting around fire.\textsuperscript{235} There was a decline in art of Mughal painting during the reign of the Emperor Aurangzeb. Because of the aversion to any form of fine arts, in particular music and painting, of Aurangzeb the last significant Mughal emperor, the royal patronage to painters inevitably declined, who were by and large then left to their own devices. The descendants of some of them established themselves as bazaar painters while most migrated to other centres like Rajasthan, Punjab Hills and to courts like those of the nawabs of Murshidabad and Awadh. In Rajasthan and in the Punjab Hills a vibrant art of miniatures flourished which synthesized within itself the local traditions with the sophistication of the Mughal style. In Murshidabad and Awadh the

\textsuperscript{234} Themes in Indian History, Part II, p.235
\textsuperscript{235} Text book in History for Class XII, National Council of Education Research and Training, Delhi 1929.

Khandalwala, Karl, “The Heritage of Islamic Art in India”, Marg, Vol xxxv, No.2 p.22
situation was quite different, as the Mughal style shed off its sophistication in favor of a more plebian style in which the features of the former were modified to suit the taste of the new patrons. The subject matter of such works revolved around portraits, court scenes, dancing and singing carousels etc.

From the company period however a number of sketches on Muslim festivals begin to become available. In Banaras festival scenes were extended to include many muslim figures like the carriers of water skins, drums, sword sticks, yak’s tail, banners, shields and lanterns, often as parts of a Muharram procession. At Murshidabad the lavish festivals of Khwaja Khizr and Muharram were visited by Thomas Skinner in about 1825 where he was so taken with the splendor of the tazias etc. that he appears to have ordered picture of them from artists. These were made on sheets of mica. Similar sets were also painted on paper. To the early 19th c belongs also the View of a Mosque and Gateway in Upper Bengal painted by Sita Ram in watercolor on paper, an artist of India who was active from 1810 to 1822, The painter of this idyllic scene, was hired to record the travels of Francis Rawdon, the governor-general of Bengal (1814–21). Sita Ram was trained in Murshidabad and was particularly skilled in depicting architecture; he prepared a total of ten albums for Rawdon, but not many of his works survive. This particular picture was probably painted during Rawdon’s tour of Bengal in the winter of 1820–21, and appears to be a composite of monuments from the Gaur district. The painting shows a calm landscape with few animals like elephant and a bullock cart in the foreground. The human figures are very small.

and have been delicately rendered. The colours used are light and have a soothing effect on the eyes. This painting is possibly a part of a series from either of the two important dispersed albums recording views of the Ganges in Bengal as also of monuments in Agra. It is characterized by a Europeanized style and exhibits a mastery of European watercolor techniques, suggesting that Sita Ram had contact with distinguished artists such as George Chinnery and Charles D'Oyly.238 Another work painted by an unknown artist, shows a Hazaribagh landscape with a Muslim tomb in the background and a lotus tank in the foreground. It is a water-colour painting in what is called the Calcutta style in which usually a large vista of space enframed the monument. The landscape pictured here, which appears barren, uncultivated and uninhabited, presents us with the actual ambience that pervades old and ruined tombs and lotus tanks of the kind depicted here. A rare example of a Muslim observance is also available from Calcutta painted in the typical Kalighat style the work presenting the festival of Muharram represented by Buraq.240 The work is simple in which the Buraq is

238 www.metmuseum.org
239 Ibid
240 Buraq Al-Buraq is a mythological steed, described as a creature from the heavens which transported the prophets. The most commonly told story is how in the 7th century, Al-Buraq carried the Islamic prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem and back during the Isra and Mi'raj or "Night Journey", which is the title of one of the chapters (sura), Al-Isra, of the Qur'an. An excerpt from a translation of Sahih al-Bukhari describes, Buraq, which is an animal white and long, larger than a donkey but smaller than a mule, who would place its hoof at a distance equal to the range of vision. Another description of the Buraq also occurs. Then he [Gabriel] brought the Buraq, handsome-faced and bridled, a tall, white beast, bigger than the donkey but smaller than the mule. He could place his hooves at the farthest boundary of his gaze. He had long ears. Whenever he faced a mountain his hind legs would extend, and whenever he went downhill his front legs would extend. He had two wings on his thighs which lent strength to his legs. He bucked when Muhammad came to mount him. The angel Jibril
shown carrying a tazia. The composition is simple, the lines clearly articulated and emphatic and the colours laid in thick washes without much modulation. The work has been dated between 1875-1900.\(^{241}\)

During the early years of the 20\(^{th}\) century a large number of prints of Muslim festivals were printed at the Ravi Varma Press in Bombay, as for instance a beautiful print of **Jumma Masjid**, Bombay by the German painter and lithographer P. Gerhardt about whom little is known except that he worked as one of the Germans who ran the Ravi Varma lithographic press. From this press are also available some prints or oleographs on Islam made by some unknown artists. In the **City of Madina** we see an architectural structure showing the city where the Prophet Muhammad went in 622 A.D. The colours used are bright and the detail of the buildings are fine and delicate. The hills and greenery are also shown in the background\(^{242}\). Another example is that of a print from Ravi Varma’s press of **Buraq** in which the landscape is shown in the background and the Buraq is in the foreground, the colors in the landscape are light and dull but the colors used in the figure of Buraq are bright. The figure is a composite one in

\[\text{(Gabriel) put his hand on his mane and said: "Are you not ashamed, O Buraq? By Allah, no one has ridden you in all creation more dear to Allah than he is." Hearing this he was so ashamed that he sweated until he became soaked, and he stood still so that the Prophet mounted him. Ahmed Mehr, Iftikar, Al-Islam: Inception to Conclusion, in p., Pub., Al-ISLAM, 2003 241 Pratapaditya Pal, Kali Calcutta and Kalighat Pictures, }\text{, Marq, Vol. 41, no. 4 1990.}\]

\[242\text{www.imagesofasia.com}\]
which the face of a female angel is attached to that of the body of an animal. The face is delicate and smiling and is decorated with ornaments, long hair and with a crown on the head. The creature has feathers like a bird as they are painted in blue, red and yellow. There are lotus flowers in the water and trees on the side.\textsuperscript{243}

Although a number of literary references to a number of Muslim narrative scenes having been exhibited at the exhibitions of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, are available very few works have been recorded. We get a painting by Gaganendranath Tagore View of a Mosque that has been documented by Thakurta Guha. The work shows skyline in brush and ink. The style of dexterous brush painting in Chinese ink which had a striking impact on the development of the artist is visible in this painting. The painting has fluent strokes and rich dark tones of ink which combine to create a prominently Japanese effect.\textsuperscript{244}

G. Hadessteldt's, \textit{The Evening Prayer} is also painted in wash technique. The work depicts two figures in Muslim dress listening reverently to a qazi who is reading from a book. There is a panel of calligraphic writing in the left of the background while a structure resembling a mihrab completes the physical context of the work. A.R. Chugtai in his huge output of works also included Muslim themes along with Hindu and other genre subjects.\textsuperscript{245} His Muslim subjects have a wide span, ranging from lyrical renderings of the poetry of Ghalib, Muhammad Iqbal to those of Omar Khayyam.\textsuperscript{246} His oeuvre also included representations of historical scenes, particularly from the Mughal history, where a meticulous attention was paid to capturing the intricate

\textsuperscript{243} www.columbia.edu
\textsuperscript{244} Guha Thakurta, Tapati, \textit{TMNIA}, p251,
\textsuperscript{245} See Chapter – III, A Search for the Divine
\textsuperscript{246} See Chapter – VI, Visualising Poetry
and fine details of architecture, particularly the delicate trellises and pietra dura work. A number of Muslim religious themes were also painted by him, in which often an emphasis was laid on the Muslim observances. The difference between the attitude of Chugtai as evident in his treatment of Hindi subjects and that of the Muslim ones has been widely noted although both exude the same aura of nostalgia “the attitude of Chugtai while painting the Hindu and Islamic themes becomes quite clear as the Islamic paintings became not only a crystallization of emotions recollected in tranquility but also an exercise in the capturing of received visual sensations. In a number of “Muslim” paintings, where his approach is more illustrational and narrative, the composition becomes more structured, a far greater emphasis is laid on the background with often clearly defined and articulated architectural devices like the delicately trellised balconies, the pietra dura work and other floral decorations, intricate tapestries, carvings and floor designs so integral a part of Mughal architecture. A great deal of attention is also paid to the fittings and fixtures in the room like the lamps, the hookah, the book stand and so on and sometimes a panel of calligraphic writing is also included in it247, as evident for instance in a work like Rehana Looking at the Moon. As against the sharp visual acuity the treatment of Hindu themes like ‘The Victorious Arjuna’ appears to be more meditative, reflective and consequently more abstract. This detailed rendering is quite clear from a study of Rehana Looking at the Id Moon where apart from the subject matter, the physiognomic type, the dress, the stance immediately brings forth a clear Muslim referral.

The works painted by S.G. Thakur Singh are more graphic and illustrational. His style of

modified academism is clearly evident in works like Namaz where a young woman offers her prayers while sitting in an alcove and the Holy book is open in front of her. Her expression is rapt and the meticulous rendering of her phisognomical features details of architecture, the carpet etc clearly puts this work in the same category as other works such as Indolence all of which seek to capture the Indian woman in her characteristic gestures.

Nicholas Roerich also painted a work, entitled Mohammed the Prophet, which shows Mohammed receiving a vision. This is one of the very few works on prophet Mohammad by Indian painters, because of the strict injunctions against his anthropomorphic representation in any form. The painting is done in the artist's typical style with an emphasis on mighty mountains in mauves and orange variations bathed in the light of the twilight. A delicate sickle like moon and some scattered faint stars shine out from the firmament. Within this majestic but rugged ambience is placed the standing figure of the prophet, draped in the typical costume of a Arab. He is viewed essentially from the back with also a faint indication of a black beard listening raptly to the shadowy Allah, who virtually becomes an emanation of the surrounding glow. The work, as a recreation of one of the most revered and beloved episodes from the development of Muslim religion, captures the sense of awe and majesty inherent in the subject.
The Mosque by Sailoz Mookerjea is a part of a series of works that the artist, executed for the Post and Telegraph Department of India as a motif for a series of postal stamps. Although the work is conceived of in terms of the artist’s typical style of fluid brush strokes of colour laid in patches, the vibrant and yet amorphous trees and other vegetation, because of the intended purpose the forms of both the figures as also of architecture are more lucid and clear. The two robed Muslim women with a burqa, legs come out of an unpretentious structure of a recognizable mosque. The very simplicity of the shrine as also the accompanying wall establish its rural context.

B.N. Arya painted Prayer in which an old man, clad in the dress of a Muslim nobleman sits on a clump of rocks telling his rosary. The figure is dressed in a typical royal robe as also the elaborate and simple head dress. Behind him flutter delicate pennants on an equally delicate staff. The far horizon has a range of mountains on the top of which an orange glow livens up the blue of the range. The wispy soft white clouds provide a sort of other worldly look to the work.

In an entire turnaround of the theme, but impregnated with equal intensity and the same spiritual glow is a work known as Purdah I, by Jehangir Sabavāl apparently a part of a whole series. The muslim context of the work is ambiguous and yet there is an abstraction, an eschewing of detail which help in firmly placing it within

248 Sailoz Mookerjea was born in 1907 in Kolkata. He studied at the Government School of Art Kolkata.

249 Jehangir Sabavāl was born in 1922 in Mumbai. He studied at Sir JJ School of Art and Heatherly School of Art London.
a Muslim context, “the three women remain ethereal, almost floating above the steps that ground them and earth their electricities. As though officiating at some secret rite, at the threshold of speech, these women glide forth from their cloisters, the swaddling placement column of the burnous cannot hide the determination of the limbs, nor can the veil mark the face.”

Bhupen Khakhar’s paintings on Islam include two works entitled Muslims around the mosque and Buraq above Cityscape which are filled with figures engaged in public activities. The Muslims around the mosque is a painting of happenings of everyday life in India and his painting Buraq above Cityscape which was painted in 1965 deliberately reflects the sizeable Muslim presence in Gujarat, depicting religious celebrations taking place in Ahmadabad, with groups of people looking on expectantly. We are undoubtedly being reminded that the basic needs and concerns of all human beings are the same, regardless of specific religions. Khakhar offers us his approach in a subdivision into pictures within a picture, to strengthen the notion that many points of view exist.

Gulam Mohammad Sheikh’s Returning Home After Long Absence painted in 1969 and repainted in 1973, shows a high courtyard wall enclosing a cluster of hipped -roof houses and a blue mosque, with a factory in distance. We see

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on the top Prophet Muhammad ascending on his mythical mare, Buraq in a derivative taken from a famous Persian miniature, and below this, a portrait of the artist's mother taken from a photograph. Flying angels accompanying the ascending prophet in the miniature now descend to frolic in the little town. Religion as a motif for a painting does not appear to have appealed to Gulam Mohammad Sheikh although in some paintings like the above mentioned he does introduce Buraq for he has remained consistently involved with an evolution of form. His paintings however are imbued with a sense of angst, he takes an understanding of religion beyond its narrow sectarian. For he himself says “more than religion, it is a sense of the sacred that guides people.”

While most of the artists have rendered only a few Muslim themes, in M.F. Husain there are large scale interpretations of various themes scattered over his long creative period. Maulvi is one of the very early works by Husain. In the pout of lips of the Mullah as also in his emphatic eye there appears to lurk a venality which probably the artist associated with the professional practitioners of religion. In his painting Mullah and Maryam from 1965 we see a ritualistic parody in severe black and white. The Mullah is a seated black figure, while gray shadows touched with active white enframe the face and play upon the hands while Maryam kneels beside him in the posture of a penitent, her bare breast covered by her crossed arms in a gesture of mingled

253 In an interview with Nadine Kreisberger in EYE The Sunday Express Magazine,June 5-11-2011
penitence and modesty. The Holy book glows white in front of the Mullah. It has been suggested that the “two fingers of the Mulla’s right hand, extended in the traditional gesture of instruction are distinctly phallic and reduce the entire theme of the painting to mockery”. The work clearly moves forward from the simple lecherousness of the earlier image of the Mullah and gives it clear overtones of sexuality. To this period also belong works like Baghdad and Taaq-e Kasra. These works were occasioned by his visit to Baghdad and both of these reveal a different handling of the subjects where the content acquires more referral overtones even as it becomes a more oblique rendering Baghdad is a fairly straightforward cityscape, complete with a bearded figure, looking suspiciously like a portrait of the painter himself, seated in the foreground. Over the turrets of the city appears the rushing figure of horse with a bleeding nude flung supine on its back. From this figure’s head smoke streaks out in a surrealistic nightmare, and blots out the sun. One is tempted to look upon Baghdad as a symbolic view of the artist’s arrival in the city, in a confusion of sensual and spiritual torment.

In later years Husain painted two very important series of works, Karbala and works on Sufism sometimes known also as the Mecca series.

256 Bartholomeu, Richard and Kapur, Shiv, Husain, p. 49, New York
Through both these series the artist seeks to understand the past in terms of the present for he is of the firm conviction that since human nature essentially remains the same the same situations although in a different context keep on repeating themselves. In *Seeru-Fil-Ard*, The injunction of the Prophet, "Go travel into the world" is taken as a metaphor for the artist’s own predilection both in India as also in the entire world. The artist himself stated, “I’m a traveler. I’ve always been travelling and feel at home everywhere in the world, it makes no difference to me where I am”. This urge to travel is inevitably symbolized by the rearing horse as it spans continents and appears to take its rider wherever its will takes it. The seated inexorable maulavi in a corner all shadowed with light and dark is perhaps a self portrait of the painter himself who within all the turmoil yet retains a sense of detachment and quietude. In the painting *Karbala: Civilization Series*, “painted around the time, the US air force was indulging in a saturation bombing of Iraq, in 1990, this painting commemorates the battle between the righteous Husain and the evil Yazid at Karbala, in Iraq: this is the central event in the Shia history, (The Battle of Karbala took place on Muharram 10, in the year 61 of the Islamic calendar (October 10, 680) in Karbala, in present day Iraq. On one side were supporters and relatives of Muhammad’s grandson Hussein ibn Ali, on the other side was a military detachment from the forces of Yazid I, the Umayyad caliph.)The Battle of Karbala is commemorated during an annual 10-day period held every Muharram by the Shi’ah as well as many Sunnis, culminating on its tenth day,
This work represents when Hussein, symbolized here by the palm-print and horse, perceives himself a martyr in the cause of truth and justice.  
The imagery of animals like an upright lion subjugating a yet defiant camel, a toy like prancing horse, the most clearly expressed motif in the work and the figure of a man clearly express the perennial conflict between the forces of righteousness and of brute force. The colours, various gradations of brown as contrasted with the whites and pales contain within themselves the essence of the theme. This work is important also in that Husain makes use of calligraphy giving it not only the traditional purpose of documenting but also as an essential stylistic component for the conveyance of the meaning of the work.

In works like those forming the Mecca series, apart from all other features it is the calligraphic characters which become the actual motif around which a whole philosophy of word and sound is woven. These works visualize certain characters of Arabic alphabet as manifestations or representations of the Immanent power itself. He himself says “God establishes All Names and then effaces them in Presence” so a tradition relates Divine Presences are states or stations in which the absolute reveals itself to the mystic in one of the forms of the Divine Names. God is present in this Name at the same moment as He is absent: the doctrine of immanence and transcendence is never to be forgotten by the Sufi. Towards the end of his life even as his approach to forms became more referral, he began to be attracted towards Sufism which for him understands the first principles of life. As he himself says” Darkness and light are the basic symbols of Sufism because they are the essential and natural forms of a valuable and godly experience.”

259 Husain’s 75th birthday was celebrated on September 17, 1990. The invitations came in two small black boxes, on which Husain had embossed this very same lion in golden colour.
These works make extensive use of the motif of Lion and calligraphy for according to Hussain “Calligraphic skill lies not only in the mastery of the individual forms but also in their relationships to the surrounding space: the balance and rhythm of form and non-form. Calligraphy, when it adopts the forms of the arabesque, deals with time and the infinite rhythms created by the encounter of objects with space within defined borders.” 260 The lion is an important symbol of Sufism. It represents 'action', the opposite of thought. Some Sufi sects believe that the lion represents the universal archetype. 261 A study of these paintings reveals a clear progression of the artist from a representational one to increasingly abstract where the letter becomes sound itself, the primordial principle of all creation. In the two paintings on Haiseen Ye Noon described here this progression is clearly evident. The horse is ubiquitous in both although in Haiseen Ye Noon, it is more graphic even as the two of them are placed against a landscape bare and sketchy almost as if it were on the first day of creation. A stylized letter in soft colours looms over them as a clearly outlined cloud. In Haiseen Ye Noon letter becomes more significant as it becomes an integral part of the horse which is increasingly toy like. One of his Sufi series painting entitled is Qaf which is the twenty first letter of the

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260 Ibid pp.130-131
261 www.columbia.edu
Arabic alphabet, representing a uvalar stop consonant sound. **Fana Baqa** in which Fana becomes the concept of “passing away and Baqa means ‘abiding’ points to the Sufi experience of God: by annihilating all that is impure as only the pure remains the horse and the character continue as motif but in this work a figure of a saintly preacher is also introduced expostulating the basic principles of the universe which is formed both of light and dark. The subdued colours and the starkness of the composition make manifest the message of the painting. In **Haiyyo Ya Qaium** except for a cluster of three leaves the treatment becomes entirely abstract as the letters dominate the composition aptly illustrating Turin aphorism from Hadith” O Energetic Living One, O self Existing One upon whom we all depend.

Another interpretation is given to the motif **Buraq** by Nahid Raza, where a flambuoyant colour creates resplendent textures. As symmetry has a special place in Raza’s spatial configurations she places a deliberate emphasis on boundaries, margins and frames as though she wanted to be “hemmed in to curb her gestural instincts.”

262 The body of the horse has clear female physiological features and the orientation of the body is such as to give it a somewhat secular interpretation as well, even as the amorphous rider so closely placed that both appear to have melded together make it an integral part of the other half consisting of the angel.

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In recent years some have taken calligraphy as their prime motif. They have either only manipulated the calligraphic symbols in such a painterly way that the work acquires an unusual dimension or have made a subtle use of it as a part of the composition.

Anis Farooqi's\textsuperscript{263} paintings range from portraiture to creative landscapes and figurative compositions. His figures in oil are painted in subdued colours and generally carry a core message eg. 'Peace and Beauty', etc. His paintings on Islamic calligraphy are painted in the style of traditional calligraphy. Numerical values were ascribed to the letters of the Arabic alphabet. For instance, Alif, the first letter has the value 1 and Mim, the first letter in the name of the Prophet, has the value 40. Alif is given the value of 1 as there is only one God and he is the Absolute Unity. The alphabets are given numerical values, as it is believed that a word can be transposed in numbers. Like the value for “Allah” is 66 and the value for the opening verse of the Koran-“In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful”- the value is 786. These numerical are his main motifs and are used as design elements and freely composed into abstract forms.\textsuperscript{264} One of the other important painters who among others used calligraphy was a Pakistani painter whose works have gained significant following in India. Sadequain\textsuperscript{265}, during his lifetime tried and successfully met the challenge of being accessible and coherent to a wider audience. His thematic content underlined his commitment to social justice and the progressive ideals of his peers. His use of colour was simplistic unhindered by nuance or subtlety. It was the contrast of the etched stroke which gave the work its easily comprehensible structure. “Sadequain’s affinity for the literary and the literal was underlined by paintings illustrating the poetry of Iqbal, Ghalib and Faiz,

\textsuperscript{263} Anis Farooqi born in 1938 in Sultanpur in UP. He did his Diploma in drawing and painting from Mumbai and M.A. and Ph.D. in drawing and painting and History of Indian arts under the guidance of the Late Prof. Nihar Ranjan Ray, Agra University. He also went to Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

\textsuperscript{264} Chaitanya Krishna, HIPMP, p 83

\textsuperscript{265} Sadequain is a Pakistani artist. He was awarded the Biennale de Paris in 1961 while he was in his 20’s.
to be followed by his Quran calligraphy during Zia era". In this painting, Sadequain has arranged the inscription on a series of boats which, in the Qur'an, often symbolize safety and security. The inscription reads: "In the name of the memorable Qur'an. In the name of the glorious Qur'an. In the name of the pen [and anything it writes]." The letters in the front of each boat, sad, qaf, and nun, may refer to the appearance of individual letters at the beginning of some suras of the Qur'an, and playfully, perhaps, allude to the artist's own name.

Another artist who has lifted the tradition of Islamic calligraphy to a higher level is Ameena Ahmad Ahuja a scholar artist and who has had scholarship in Islamic philosophy and poetry. She selects verses from Islamic poets in Arabic, Persian and Urdu and uses in her calligraphic works and creates structured overall images of things mentioned as metaphors in the texts. "She uses confident strokes, and tensile balance of its curves, the variations of tones through fully loaded or practically dry pen adds beauty to the paintings. Many of these look like wire sculpture and have sculpturesque quality confined to a two dimensional plane." Mohammad Yasin calligraphed words “Allah” or “Mohammed, and made many paintings in this manner so he continuously varies the style of calligraphy. The most innovative feature of his painting is that the calligraphy is overlaid on a ground design of

266 Dalmia Yashodhara, Hashmi Salima, Memory, Metaphor, Mutations, Contemporary Art of India and Pakistan, p.17, (ed. and intro )Yashodhara Dalmia, Oxford University Press,2007
267 Chaitanya Krishna, HIPMP, p 83
268 Ibid p.84.
squares, in different colours. These ground patterns develop associations with those of Tantra which stressed that the universe is an intentional creation of God, a conviction common to Hinduism and Islam, in fact to all religions. According to Krishna Chaitanya he creates a subtle composition where, "closely studied, the linear contours of the compositional units of the ground design themselves link up, define and repeat "Allah" or "Mohammad"- already presented focally in various styles of traditional calligraphy in an elusive but still decipherable abstract modernistic calligraphy." 269 Raza Zaidi who is closest to tradition finds delight in posing to himself the problem of containing the calligraphed verse with some compositional beauty within specific shapes like for instance the medallion. One of his works, it is more modern in feeling where he has experimented in innovative style where the forms recall those of Klee. 270 These very contemporary works appear to be going back to the early Islamic painting here calligraphy verse formed the motif of a work or became an integral part of the composition.

Because of the strict theological injunctions against the making of any images of the Prophet, inevitably the modern Indian painter has either represented him in a symbolical, only indicative way as in a Roerich or has concentrated on depicting the ritualistic observances and artefacts associated with them. Thus we have a large number of renderings of Masjid or Namaz in widely differing styles, according to the stylistic preferences of the artist depicting them in the process however imbuing them with an entirely different content and meaning as for instance while The Evening Prayer by G. Hadessteldt evokes a

269 Ibid p.83
270 Ibid p .82
dreamy almost an ethereal atmosphere the academic Namaz of Thakur Singh treats of the subject in a more earthy way emphasizing particularly the details that help in establishing the physical context of the work. The first indication of a change occurring in the approach of the artist can be sensed in Masjid by Sailoz Mukherjea where the artist transcends the limitations imposed on him by his choice of style and begins to treat of the theme in a somewhat abstract way evident in the figures of the women while at the same time rooting it in a specific locale as is clear from the treatment of the mosque. A more oblique treatment marks the work by Jahangir Sabavala where instead of an amalgamation of the covert and overt constituents as in Mookerjea the figures themselves inhabit an ethereal sphere, and become more conceptual rather than perceptual. It is in the works by Husain however that not only an evolution of style but content as perceived by the artist himself can be seen. The works range from an almost graphic representation of the theme to a more subtle and perceptive one, in which all elements of style coalesce. His style becomes more and more abstract in response to his own perception of the deep content in the Muslim context. It is for this reason that he made a large number of the letters of the alphabet each of which has a numerical significance taking the content further by understanding the coalescence between word and sound, an entirely abstract principle. The works of later artists who take calligraphy as a motif can be read at two levels: symbolical in which word, sound, form, patterns all become one and as the completion of the style by taking it to its original beginnings.