



## Islamic Perspective of using drama and art for the purpose of Islamic Dawah and Cultured Entertainment

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### ABSTRACT:

One of the distinguished attributes of the Muslim ummah because of which Allah has regarded them as the best nation (Aal e Imran: 110) is that they have been given the responsibility of differentiating the difference between right and wrong and call people to the Islamic doctrine and morals with wisdom and best method of preaching, which were the two basic guidelines given in the Quran about the noble act of dawah. (Nahal: 125) The guidelines are general and not specific to any fixed method or platform. In the light of these guidelines, if Muslims can use modern arts and platforms like the mass media, films and vocal music etc which are the activities of interest for common people nowadays, in order to reach out to more people and specially younger audience who are immensely involved with the entertainment industry and internet, and inspire them about the ideology of Islam, this would not only be a smart strategy but a perfect utilization of such an impactful tool of this modern era. The article aims to review the use of how such arts have been used historically for propagating Islamic message and how the modern day platforms can be utilized for the purpose embedding and insinuating Islamic ideology

and thought in the minds of the audience to ultimately inspire them to willingly embrace the Islamic way of life.

**A: What is Islamic Art?**

Islamic art is the art which is according to the principles of Islam. Islam doesn't forbid art. The Islamic art was born and produced in the areas where Islam was in rule. The author Wijdan Ali who is an expert in Islamic art says that the Islamic art is not only limited to Muslim artists but it includes

“Any artistic manifestation created by a Muslim or non-Muslim artists that adheres to Islamic aesthetics, principles and concepts, and that is created for the spiritual, intellectual and physical usage and Enjoyment of Muslims and non-Muslims livings within the sphere of Islamic thoughts and Civilization” (W.Ali, 1999)

Islam, through its main source of preaching, AL-Quran, value the arts. Allah encourages the human to observe the universe that has been in balance beautifully. The Quran mentioned in Surah (Qaf): 6:

“Do they not look at the sky above them? How we have made it and adorned it, and there are no flaws in it.”

Since Islamic art is difficult to characterize as it includes all arts including architecture, calligraphy, genres, lands etc. Islamic art is difficult to characterize because it covers a wide range of lands, periods, and genres, including Islamic architecture, Islamic calligraphy. People use these Islamic arts to express their love for Islam. Islamic arts is something which is commonly used in many things like in events and in lectures as background with Naats and nasheeds and poetry. This characterizes the associated along with the beliefs of Muslims. For past many years Muslims have been using Islamic art and still it is being used in many ways. Islamic art had and still has much importance in Pakistan and countries in Sub Continent where Islam prevails. Islamic art is of great attraction in as an attachment to Islam as comparison to any other form of art.

If we define an artist then a artist is one who has a mind as sea which contains dreams, colors with imaginations and inventions. Here's a list of some famous Islamic artists.

1. Lubna Agha: She has an artistic mind which creates a relation with modern abstract and traditional forms of paintings which represent Islam.
2. Bano Qudsia: She was a Pakistani Novelist, play writer and spiritualist
3. Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai: A Sindhi mystic, sufi poet, scholar and a famous Saint in the Internal Sindh.
4. Abida Parveen: Sufi Muslim singer, composer and musician.
5. Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi: Best known for his skills as a calligrapher.

More than 1400 years Islamic art has included many nations, lands. It cannot be related to a specific religion or time or place instead it is being used and appreciated by everyone around the globe.

**B: Example of Islamic Art.**

Islamic art can be defined and explained in many forms. Following will be the forms of art and how they have impacted in certain ways to Muslims and Non-Muslims. These are the types of arts which Muslims have used to communicate with both Non-Muslims and Muslims. Islamic art includes Film, Movies, Theatre, Qawwaali, Naat, Nasheed, and Poetry.

**B.1: Film and Television.**

In the western world there is dominance narration of the public that Islamic is a violent religion and Muslims and Islami are foreign and dangerous and the western worlds should be suspicious about them and should be alert and be careful with them in all ways. Though there is a long history against Muslims that how they are negatively described and portrayed in Cinematic world as well as on Television. Muslims were and are considered terrorists. In the film and television world artist named Jack Shaheen (1935-2017) is considered as a pioneer in the studies of Muslims and Islam in Films and on Television. Shaheen has been working for decades in a way to change the negative minds of western world against Islam and Muslims through social activism and Media marketing. When Shaheen passed away in 2017 many obituaries (New York Times, Washington Post, Al-Jazeera) were displayed and posted as to recognize the work of Shaheen and outlined his victories. His film reel "Bad Arabs" Shaheen worked on Muslims to portray as positive image to the Western World.

In past decade there is an increase in the number of writers, directors, actors and producers who belong to the Muslims community and the main purpose of them being in this field is to educate the mass number of people of the western world and providing them a point of view regarding Muslims, Arabs and Islam. Qasim Bashir is a writer who is a Muslim and he scripted a movie named "Mooz-Lum" which describes the struggle and the hardships which Muslims faced during and after the 9/11 attack in America. After the attack of 9/11, there was strange thing to be seen that Arabs and Muslims on the US televisions were gaining sympathy and Muslims and Arabs were having sympathetic portrayals on Television in US. For this, if a Television Series or a Hollywood movie was made and a Muslim or Arab terrorist was also in the movie then the script also included a positive depiction of a Muslim or an Arab so that the negative mindset could be removed from people's head. Many dramas and tv series included Arabs and Muslims American in their stories showing that they were targeted of unjust Patriotism against US or hate crimes due to 9/11 attack. Representation of Arabs and Muslims of American

Nationality were proliferated in the US Television after years of the attack of 9/11 so as to minimize the hate crime, workplace hate and airline discrimination against them. After which Qasim Bashir introduced Muslims and Arabis in his movie named “Mooz-lum” which received a positive feedback.

In recent times, another television series that emerged and gained massive popularity worldwide and specially in Pakistan is “Dirilis Ertugrul”. It is an Islamic themed Turkish drama series which is based on true historical events. The series precisely centers on the life long journey of a warrior Ertugrul who was the father of Usman (the founder of Ottoman Empire). The forte of this TV series is that it presents the tale of real characters and it is about a real story of the rise of Muslims. Our new generation, which has been fascinated by fictional characters such as Batman, Superman and Spider-Man, now has the opportunity to see Ertugrul Ghazi, a real figure in Muslim history.

One of the things that impressed everyone in this series is how attractive men look in beards and women in full dresses, which is a salient portrayal of Islamic values. The drama tells how a few members of a small tribe who had faith, courage and complete trust in Allah Almighty, permeated and spread all over the world with this trust and courage and eventually established a great sultanate. The underlying thought and notion behind their struggle was to liberate Muslims everywhere from the tyranny and domination of the tyrant non-Muslims and to present a true picture of the unity of Muslims all over the world in such a way that all Muslims would live under one flag, Which was the flag of the Ottoman Empire.

The most amazing thing about this series that has captivated and dazzled the audience are the inspiring dialogues of this drama series which really deserve to be written in golden words. Infact, after series gained popularity, people have started posting these dialogues on their social media as quotes. In conclusion, this TV series emphasizes and conveys the messages like obedience of Allah, love of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, Islamic pride, nationalism, religious empathy and human welfare. This drama is great for educating children about Islamic values, for awakening national pride and for awakening the belief in the minds of the people that if a Muslim has courage, trust in Allah and steadfastness on the guidelines of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, no power on earth can get the better of them, even if they are relatively small in strength.

In this genre, a drama that deserves mentioning was “Main Abdul Qadir Hoon” that aired on hum TV in 2010. The story tells of a boy named Abdul Qadir, who belonged to an elite class liberal family. The story covers three phases of Abdul Qadir’s life, from being an innocent child who was deprived of time and attention from his parents, to a heartbroken carefree adult who resides in England, then finally transforming into a practicing Muslim and man with noble character. The drama is basically about how in usual upper class families of the modern society, there is very less attention given to educate children about their religion and values, as they consider it backward and unimportant rather children are raised in an environment where wealth, possessions and

materialistic achievements are considered success and a source of attaining respect and status in the society. Abdul Qadir, who was raised in such an environment, met a girl in his young adulthood, who broke his heart as a result he was devastated. As he didn't have anyone to turn to for moral support as his parents were busy neither he had the sense to turn to Allah for the easement of emotional suffering. This is the point where his second phase started as he went to England and totally immersed himself into local culture, started partying and drinking to get over his breakup and emotional stress. Later, when he had become a complete sinner, he once tried to be too forthcoming and sociable with his housekeeper girl, in response to this she pleads to him in the name of Allah and prophet and that hit him deeply. From here, starts his third phase as that incident and that girl remembering Allah in adversity really left a mark in his heart as he remembered he is a Muslim too and how disconnected he has been with his creator. Eventually he comes back to Islam completely as he found real peace of heart and mind in Allah's worship and Islamic way of life. This drama also covered the challenges he later faced for practicing religion in his upper class society and how perfectly he handles and inspires others to follow the same path as he did. So overall, this drama was a complete package of extremely relatable scenarios that young Muslims of modern era come across and it is also conveyed how in following Islam, there is true success for people of every section of the society.

A Muslim artist and writer named Kamran Pasha who wrote for a TV Show named *Sleeper Cells* (2005). He wrote a few episodes of the TV series. The series tells about a police officer who is an undercover cop and his mission is to uncover a terrorist group and a cell. Kamran was assigned an important role in the series as a writer where he gave the details about the Muslims and Islam which allowed to show more realism in the series. This made him to educate the audience in a way to show views of all the Muslims regarding Extremists Islam. He also wrote an episode in which there is debate which took place between Muslims and Non-Muslims of moderate nature but of extreme views. This shows that working for Muslims, Arabs is quite difficult to work in the movie or television field. Though, this field is one the helpful way to motivate and educate Muslims and Non-Muslims towards Islamic extremism.

A survey was created and Muslims Americans were asked questions. They shared their experience that they didn't know the characters in films and movies which were terrorist and they didn't recognize the Muslim artists who played the role of a terrorist. This is not merely a coincidence but for past many years Muslims artists have played the roles of terrorists in American and other movies. The characters were portrayed as dangerous, violent and as terrorist. Maz Jobrani who is a actor and a comedian, Sayed Barreya, Waleed Zuaiter and many others who are Muslims have played the role as a terrorist since they have no choice other than this. We can see many examples and one of them is in a TV Series on FOX 24 that a terrorist jump off a train with a bomb strapped to him and screams the words "ALLAH O AKBAR". This phrase or words are used on regularly

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basis by Muslims to praise ALLAH but in this scenario these words show danger and terrorism.

This shows Muslims were not given the opportunities in Film and Television. But with the passage of time, Muslims continued to get opportunities in film and television. All these writers did a magnificent job in making Muslims popular in film and television. There are some films and series that featured positive Muslims characters for example the 13<sup>th</sup> warriors (1999), Ali (2001), Islam: Empire of faith (2000), Loins of the Desert (1981).

Films and television are the best way to create awareness about Islam among the people. This can improve the image of Muslims throughout the world. By means of film and television we can also give rise to Islamic art with the help of artist and architecture. Author of “Taking Back Islam: American Muslims Reclaim Their Faith” (2002) and a producer Michael Wolf says:

“There is a driving motivation behind the film to an understanding that this is Muslim culture emanates from a large history and a large number of people alive on the Earth today who take a real interest in this work, in this kind of artistic expression. In screening this film in so many different museums around the country, I have come to realize that people are really avid to learn a little more about the conversation that has been taking place over centuries between western art and Islamic art”

The director and filmmaker of the movie named Islamic Art: Mirror of the Invisible world, Robert Gardener celebrates and explores the Islamic art and Architecture throughout the world. He says.

“We can say that film and television plays an important role to spread Islamic teachings and educating people. Whereas, technology has made it quite easy for the people living in different parts of the world”

## **B.2: Theater.**

The most entertaining form is the theatre where people visit to enjoy. This form of entertainment and art had been around the world for many centuries. People enjoy drama, music, comedy. Theatre history ranges back to the sixth century. First nation to present theatre were the Greeks who presented theater is the form of a drama.

It is a living art form in which actor/actresses perform in front of an audience. In eastern Muslims the theatre is not very common but it has great importance in the west Muslim communities. Domestic Crusades can be quoted as an example of theatre by Wajahat Ali.

For teaching Islam and about Muslims, “Khayaal Theatre” is a group which plays and user their scripts to guide and educated about Islam. Theatre can be included to teach and educated since it can be used regarding certain aspects of Islamic culture.

Oppressed theatre is a kind of theatre was formed in the country of Brazil in 1690. During 1950 and 1960 Augusto Boal formed the kind of theatre which is also popular as a community based education since it can be used as tool for social change.

This form was developed by Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal during the 1950's and 1960's. Theatre of the oppressed is a form of popular community based education that uses theatre as a tool for social change. As Augusto said

“The purpose of Theatre Of Oppressed is to rehumanize humanity “

This type of theater also includes some techniques such as Image Theater Forum theatre, Newspaper Theater, invisible theatre and legislative theater. Theatre has not gained much attention as an art in Islam, though it is a popular source of entertainment in shows of different nature.

Ottomans in Turkey praised and supported live theatre shows and also it was also popular in Persia. In Turkish and Arabic speaking countries Shadow Plays are very much popular for past many centuries. In Islamic art, theatre has been used a form to educate as well as entertain people by Muslims.

The theatre which is being displayed now a days wasn't present or displayed in the era of Prophet Muhammad (d.632), though some signs were present and from which we are able to use the tool of theatre to communicate Islam. Some independent theaters of Pakistan are local theater, theatre in capital, Saadat Hasan Manto, Umer Shareef. This shows that theater is a source of entertainment and a source of education as well.

### **B: 3 Music.**

The art of arranging sounds in a specific duration to produce a composition by the use of rhythm, harmony and melody is called Music. The use of Musical instruments in Islam is not permissible. A Saudi scholar Arabia Sheikh Saleh Al- Munajjid give evidence from the Holy Quran and from the Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) that Music or its instruments use in Islam is not permissible. There is a verse of the Qur'an, where Allah says

“And of mankind is he who purchases idle talk to mislead (men) From the path of Allah, without knowledge, and takes it (the path of Allah, the verses of the Qur'an) by the way of mockery. For such there will be a humiliating torment (in the hell-fire)” [Surah Luqman 13:6]

It has been said that 'idle talk' means singing and the use of musical instruments. There are also some scholar who allow music for example, a scholar from Saudi Arabia, Shaikh Adel Al Kalbani, said that the use of music or musical instruments or singing is not completely forbidden. Al Kalbani himself was against singing and music but he has changed his Mind. He said:

“I have read the fatwas of those saying singing and music were against Islam. I strongly supported them and had a famous sermon on this but I changed my mind when I found out that prohibition of singing and music in Islam was based on weak evidence”

(A.R.Shaheen, 2010)

According to some Muslims that singing is allowed and instruments are not allowed whereas opinion of other Muslims are opposite and they say that these are allowed. If we see the definition of Music then it tells us that it is the combination of vocals and instruments. In the Arabic language, the word Musiqa which is a kind of audio art in Islamic legal tradition. The discussion in the Muslims is not related to the audio art but whether the audio art is allowed and what kinds of audio arts are allowed. If we see the Quran there is no direct reference for music. Therefore, the consensus regarding the audio art falls into main three categories which are legitimate, controversial and illegitimate. The call to prayers are considered to be legitimate.

Whereas controversial audio arts contain all other kinds of music. Illegitimate audio arts are considered to be those who drive away the people from the Islamic commandments. This is a long debate and have been in discussion for past many years that the use of Music or musical instruments are permissible in Islam or not.

The role of music in Islamic art is different. Music is the best way to express your feelings, your love towards anything. Another type of music is Qawwali and Nasheeds. These are traditional music Qawwali is a form of Sufi Islamic devotional singing and has great importance especially in India and Pakistan. On the other hand nasheed is a work of vocal music that is either sung by a cappella or accompanied by instruments. Nasheed and Qawwali are popular through the Islamic world. These types of Music also plays an important role in Islamic traditions

#### **4. Qawwali.**

Qawwalis is another form of music by Sufis and poetry written by Saints which increases and stimulate the devotion towards religion and to take a step ahead in spiritually closeness to ALLAH. The origin of Qawaali can be dated back to the eighth century. The most of the Qawwalis performed are in languages of Urdu and Punjabi. Qawwalis are the people who perform Qawaali using the instruments such as Harmonium, Table and Sarangi. The Qawwals perform solo or more than two performers at a time.

Qawaali is a form of music performed by Sufis to stimulate religious devotion and a sense of spiritual closeness to Allah. The origin of Qawaali can be traced back to 8<sup>th</sup> century Persia. Qawwali songs are mostly performed in Punjabi and Urdu. Qawwali is performed by a group known as Qawwals, led by one or two solo singers, the group use traditional instruments such as Harmonium, tabla, dholak and sarangi. A spiritual atmosphere is created through the entrancing vocals and hypnotic rhythm. It is a Sufi ritual that is very common in South Asia. The lyrics consist of the relationship between



Allah and man based on love, devotion for Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and account of pious people of the past. If we talk about the history of Qawwali we can see that Qawwalis were first being performed in the west.

Qawwalis are also very popular in Pakistan. Some famous Qawwals of Pakistan are listed below,

1. Rahat Fateh Ali Khan
2. Ameer Khusrow
3. Sabri Brothers
4. Abida Parveen
5. Amjad Sabri

### **5: Nasheed**

Nasheed is described as an Islamic song. It is a work of Vocal music that is either sung a Cappella (without instruments accompaniment) or accompanied by instruments. Nasheed is performed solo or with two or more persons that recites prayers in Arabic language, and reminders of various belief of Islam. It includes sounds recorded previously or an instrument like duff only. The terminologies or language or phrases used are understood by Muslims. It is different from Qawwali. There are some famous nasheed writers such as Sami Yousuf, Zain Bhika, Maher Zain, and Ahmed Bukhatir.

Many of these artists and performers are performing more than a decade and gave a big number of followers around the world. All these belong to the same art form but they can be separated in different sections. Some artist do not really use instruments, they only use their voices as a melody or use duff in their Nasheed while some artists use variety of instruments in their performance

### **6: Spoken Word Poetry:**

Poetry is the art in which one can express themselves in a meaningful way as a writer or an artist. It is one of the most beautiful way to express your thoughts. Also other than the term poetry there is another way of writing your thoughts or synonym for poetry which is called spoken word poetry.

The main difference between both is that the Poetry is kind of expressing more personal thought of the artist or the poet. The poet expresses their own emotions and thoughts whereas on the other hand in spoken word poetry the words expect to receive reactions from the audience. Spoken word poetry can be considered as a live theatre.

Spoken word poetry includes content like that of Qawaali and Nasheeds including music but no musical instruments are included in it. In spoken word poetry there is no need of music which makes it more widely accepted by Muslims, spoken word poetry is popular in west. Poetry and spoken word poetry both are the best ways to express your thoughts.

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Some famous spoken word artists are Amir Sulaiman, Boona Muhammad, Mona Haydar, and Liza Garza are artist of spoken word poetry who are much popular within Muslim community and Islamic shows. In the western side, Amir Sulaiman is the one who is much popular in this field.

Boona Muhammad has used more Islamic terms and reference in his spoken word poetry which differentiates him from Amir and Liza in this field. In Pakistan Annum Salman, a bright young Pakistani spoken word poet and writer, she has recently published her first poetry collection Sense Me that is being loved and appreciated across the globe. It shows that this form of art is gaining fame day by day and has great importance in artistic field.

### **6: Calligraphy.**

Calligraphy is visual art related to writing. It is the most common and the most beautiful art form. The representation of Arabic language on canvases, paintings, pages and walls is known as Calligraphy. It is present since the early eras of Islam. The Arabic language is held in great Esteem by Muslims since Quran is revealed in the language of Arabic. Therefore, the Calligraphy is also held in great esteem. The art of Calligraphy include more than one types of text

1. Quotations from Quran
2. Other religious scriptures
3. Poems
4. Praise for rulers

In calligraphic design the art was made of many different things and materials like wood, glass, textile, ceramic etc. Now a days in this digital world the calligraphy is done digitally on computers using tools like Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator etc. It has also been used in logos, wallpapers etc. The job calligrapher is considered to be highly praised and appreciated in the Islamic community due to the excellence of their work.

In this era the modern form of calligraphy has been also emerged in the western hemisphere and a fusion of traditional calligraphy with the modern artistic form has been used. There are many example in which one is the use of calligraphy by Muhammad Ali, the graffiti who used it to spread the message of Islam and Muslims. Many murals has been well known with the Quranic verses and the Hadith of Prophet (PBUH). The graffiti is painted anywhere by the use of spray cans and widely used and displayed in the western world.

Another most famous and well known calligrapher of Pakistan is Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi. He was awarded by Tamgha-e-Imtiyaz, Pride of performance, and Sitara-e-Imtiyaz for his magnificent work of calligraphy. Considered as the one of the most highly regarded calligrapher and painter in the Pakistan nation. Sadequain produced one of the finest arts of calligraphic painting. So it is said that calligraphy has a great importance in the Islamic art form.

**7: Fine Arts.**

One of the major forms of Art is “Fine Arts” which is mainly considered and regarded due to its aesthetic value and beauties. It is an art which includes drawings of peoples and other living things. In Islam, drawing living beings and other living creatures has been in discussion whether it is allowed or not. Some Scholars allow it and some forbid it.

According to some scholars the view is that making the portraits of any human being or any living creature is prohibited in Islam since Prophet (PBUH) strictly forbid the drawing of living beings with souls. Many Hadith in the books of Bukhari and Muslims which support this. Hazrat Aisha (May Allah be pleased with her) stated that

“The messenger of Allah (S.A.W) visited me after returning from a journey, and I had a shelf with a thin cloth curtain hanging over it and on which there were portraits. When he saw it, the color of his face changed (Because of anger) and he said, “O Aisha! The most grievous torment from Allah on the Day of Resurrection will be for those who imitate (Allah) in the act of His creation.” Aisha said: we tore it into pieces and made a Cushion or two cushions out of that.”

[Al- Bukhari and Muslim]

However, the Prophet did allow the drawing of non-living creatures and objects like sceneries and trees and landscapes which don't have a soul. There are many artists who give remarkable performance in the field of art. There are also some artist such as Nadia Janjua, who not only does painting and drawing but also does architectural designs. Another artist is Asma Inam, She is a graphic designer who does a variety work in fine arts. She has used Typography, which is a style of presenting words in a different form. Fine arts include Drawings, paintings, sculptures, architecture, calligraphy, photography. The Arts are an important cultural tool for expressing concern and love to world we live.

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