

## **‘Shakir Ali, an Enigma within a Layered Reality’**

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### **Abstract**

Shakir Ali was a man of multiple identities. As a teacher, the administrator of an art college and a prolific artist, in the beginning years of the newly founded post-colonial state of Pakistan, he enjoyed an almost mythical reputation among the many subsequent generations of art students and artists. This research paper delineates his path as an administrator/educator at the new art college, National College of Arts (NCA), while contextualizing it with his other identities. He was an artist, an occasional writer and had earlier taught at the Mayo School of Arts (MSA). A probe into the realm of art instruction in the early days of a post colony provides valuable insights into the socio-political and cultural contexts thereby facilitating the analysis of administrative constraints as well as instructional methodologies. The methodology adopted is that of qualitative research, structured and un-structured interviews with the first and second batch of students of newly founded NCA, triangulation being done through archival sources and published literary accounts.

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### **Who is Shakir Ali?**

The question, who is Shakir Ali, should be intriguing for art circles in Pakistan. Shakir Ali was an important figure in different and diverse domains. Shakir Ali the painter was also a writer, art college administrator and art educator. There are many who know Shakir Ali: some personally in the capacity of students, colleagues, and friends, while others, as mere admirers and connoisseurs of his art works. Then there are those who shared with him evenings at the literary get-togethers. So some perceive him as a great artist, modern painter or a quiet, devoted-to-art scholar, teacher; some recall him as a distant administrator and an appealing writer, still there are some who prefer to feel excited simply to have seen him. It is another matter that all these apparently divergent identities when coalesced make up roughly of how most in the Pakistani art circles, now know of him.

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Indeed, all these different embodiments are relevant in the given contexts. However as a researcher, it is difficult to signal out a single word that adequately captures the multitudes of Shakir Ali's public profile because, despite all of what is commonly known, there are still many finer aspects of his persona that remain unnoticed. Who is Shakir Ali then? Or more aptly, in the domain of art-education, especially with regard to his role in creating what the Pakistan's premier public sector art institution NCA has become today, who is Shakir Ali, the principal to NCA then?

Although much has already been written about so many aspects already, still it is only fair that both the visible and not so visible marks, texts, letters on Shakir Ali be researched further to find the underlying patterns of his life. So by culling some of the ignored aspects of his multidimensional personality, this paper, after a consistent examination of the NCA archives, interviews with the alumni who attended NCA in Shakir Ali's times and own observations and experiences as the senior-most NCA faculty member attempts to augment the existing portraiture of Shakir Ali and propose the following research question:

### **Research question**

What do several of the almost untouched, National College of Arts (NCA), erstwhile the Mayo School of Art (MSA), the institution where he spent most of his working life, official documents tell us about Shakir Ali's formative role as the principal of the NCA in making of what the NCA is today?

This question is posed to claim that if we wish to know Shakir Ali better, then, the seemingly innocuous trivia, filed in Shakir Ali's personal files in the NCA archives, will have to be taken into consideration along with his art works, writings, teaching, and administrative experience. Otherwise his portraiture will be incomplete. It would be almost like when one enters into the principal's office at NCA, an eye contact with Shakir Ali's portrait—painted by Colin David—is instantly established. And one may have a fleeting feel that one *knows* the legendary NCA principal Shakir Ali. Even if you have never heard of him, the formal elements of the painting narrate sufficiently the outward personality of Shakir Ali: a sedate, gentleman-like, unadulterated artistic-artist. A befitting tribute of one great artist, Colin David,<sup>1</sup> to the other, of course, Shakir Ali.

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<sup>1</sup> Colin David, one of Pakistan's most celebrated painters and a former teacher at NCA.

For a cursory visitor to the NCA principal’s office this deferential introduction, concretized in this portrait, to Shakir Ali is sufficient. Nevertheless for those seriously interested and responsively involved in the art circles and art education in Pakistan the existing knowledge about Shakir Ali—if not as superficial as the onlookers of Shakir Ali’s portrait – is deficient.

As an art educator and practitioner, my own journey to secure a better grip over the nuances of the almost fabled head, Principal Shakir Ali, of this fabled art institution, NCA, began as a novice. First as an NCA student and later as a teacher there, I too reconciled with the generic story that was Shakir Ali, the artist, and ‘the principal’. However, now when I have closely examined his personal files, I feel close to understanding at least part of what I believe has remained un-discussed of Shakir Ali’s role in what is NCA today.

### Early years of Pakistan

My journey of understanding art education’s formative years took me through the early years of Pakistan with all its ground realities, fears, aspirations, targets, ideals,<sup>2</sup> clarifying so many pre-conceived notions.

Gustav Papanek in his book, *Pakistan’s development: Social Goals and Private Incentives*,<sup>3</sup> describes Pakistan envisaged by many as ‘an economic monstrosity’. ‘The country was among the poorest in the world and had no industries to speak of, almost no industrial raw materials, no significant industrial or commercial groups. It was difficult to see how Pakistan’s economy could grow more rapidly than its population. Economic chaos and political disintegration seemed more likely. The 1950s were a period of apparent stagnation and mounting economic problems, when early dire predictions seemed to be fulfilled’, he stated.

In the plethora of other problems, the Pakistan Planning Board identified the trained manpower shortage as a major barrier in fulfilling its Five Year Plan—a barrier as formidable as the shortage of economic resources and foreign exchange. This has been extensively researched in the paper titled ‘The Ford Foundation Program in Pakistan’ by George F. Gant, written in May 1959 and may other such paper.

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<sup>2</sup> The early days of Pakistan aptly written about in the literary works of many celebrated writers such as Quratul Ain Haider, Abdullah Hussain and Intizar Hussain along with many others.

<sup>3</sup> Gustav Papanek, *Pakistan’s Development: Social Goals and Private Incentive* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), p.1. For further details on the economic situation of Pakistan’s early years, read S. Akbar Zaidi’s, *Issues in Pakistan’s Economy: A Political Economy Perspective* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, third edition, 2015).

### From MSA to NCA

It was in this over-arching backdrop of the economically depressive and complicated early days of Pakistan that plans were made to up-grade technical education in general and to re-organize the Mayo School of Arts into a National College of Arts along with many other institutions, in particular, in response to the socio-cultural and socio-economic imperatives of the newly founded state of Pakistan.

The crucial moment of this segment has its moorings in the transition of the colonial times Mayo School of Arts to the National College of Arts, Lahore, in the late 1950s. This institutional transformation was part of the plan of improving technical education that could meet assertively the economic and socio-cultural challenges of this newly founded state of Pakistan.<sup>4</sup>

### Sponenburgh-led original 'NCA –Vision'

It must be clarified at this point that the rationale for presenting Sponenburgh's vision is to clarify the context in which Shakir Ali later played his role as the administrator/principal of the NCA, and consequently his input toward this evolving vision.

To understand Shakir Ali's role in evolving the art school that NCA is today, it is important to quickly review the NCA's founding vision (NCA-Vision).<sup>5</sup> Mark Ritter Sponenburgh, the first NCA principal, who saw through the transition from the MSA to the NCA, formulated the NCA-Vision or the guiding mission for the NCA. Sponenburgh, it appears from the NCA archives as well as the alumni interviews, proposed an art institution which had a broader perspective: one based loosely on the model of Bauhaus, yet rooted in the indigenous mores of arts and crafts.

This NCA-Vision included, essentially, following features:

- 1) The NCA would train, foremost, the students as designers to meet the new challenges in the fields of architecture, commerce, and industry.

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<sup>4</sup> For more details regarding Ford Foundation Papers for their grants towards institutional over-hauling and transformation see F.G. Grant, 'The Ford Foundation Program in Pakistan', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Social Science* 323 (1959), pp.150-59. Accessed on 30 May 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1033535>

<sup>5</sup> For details see NCAA file no. 49-E, Annual Convocation Report of the National College of Arts (Part I & II), 1959-61, H-26.

- 2) The NCA would serve as the harbinger of increasing the design-awareness and improving the public taste in this respect.
- 3) The NCA would facilitate a scope for modern ideas in art, where forward-looking, globalized approaches to art practices would be pursued. (Personal communication with alumni).

It is admirable that the international donor agencies like the USEF, Asia Foundation UNESCO and Ford Foundation came forward in a bid to put the new country on the world map of contemporary art and design. So the NCA was to have an international support system to develop as a powerful art and design institution. There were difficulties regardless of the well-thought out plans and available funding. An unsupportive bureaucracy lacking in consolatory appreciation, or may be proper comprehension, for an art and design institution was no help.<sup>6</sup> There were other problems too.

In the little over three years that his contract lasted, Sponenburgh designed the working-pattern of the administration, put the courses in place, hired faculty, took many futuristic decisions based on the demands that the national and the international markets were expected to make on the NCA teaching staff and the graduating students – Sponenburgh, all the documentary evidence shows, led by example in showing the way forward to the NCA faculty, administrative staff, and students.<sup>7</sup>

Pakistan was in dire need of creative and constructive minds to think, plan, and skillfully execute the plans and realize these thoughts about how Pakistan should develop as a strong developed country among the comity of world nations. NCA was called upon time and again, by the powers that were, to play a very *important* role in the *development* of the country.<sup>8</sup> Since—at least on the papers—the cherished objective of national prosperity was the foremost goal.

Sponenburgh’s well-spelled out institutional vision grounded essentially in the indigenous aesthetic, material and skill resource, was simultaneously guided by the emerging modern trends in art, industrial and architectural design. Sponenburgh though trying his best felt entrapped by the red tape and the ‘booby traps’ laid by the bureaucracy to such an extent that he left after the completion of his contract period without seeing the first batch of students through.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Prof. Shakir Ali and NCA's early years**

Upon Spokenburgh's departure, Government of Pakistan through its notification No I-I-3/60KK.O dated 16-06-1961 directed Prof. Shakir Ali to take over temporary charge of the post of principal, National College of Arts, Lahore.<sup>10</sup>

Shakir Ali officiated as the principal for a number of years before he was appointed as the permanent principal of NCA. The NCA records of the official correspondence pertaining to those early years reveal that the NCA, under the administrative control of the Department of Industries — an ever-interfering, over-bearing bureaucracy, with meager resources and the faculty wanting in many respects—was not a happy place to administer. In the very first month of his assumption of the role of principal, he encountered problems from the bureaucracy and he let his displeasure known. The college's status remained an existing establishment from one year to the other while Prof. Shakir Ali applied every year for the sanction of its continuance. Faculty was an unhappy lot. There was no job security, no pension system in place for the longest of time at the NCA.

Assumption is that this lack of permanence in their jobs did not let faculty develop the necessary interest that would work towards making their teaching careers a success. People inherently wished to become teachers in the public sector because they wanted job security in the new country where socio-economic realities were playing havoc with their lives.<sup>11</sup> Although the unique experiment that the NCA was, archival evidence testifies, it was not a success in the early years. Organisational problems were rampant when Shakir Ali was given the acting charge but, for a variety of reasons, he requested on many occasions that the founding principal be brought back to see his vision through. All these factors contributed to the resultant re-organisations and transitions later.

As discussed earlier, the first and original transition in 1958 proved to be an incomplete one and paved the way for many others. There was a lot of room for tweaking. The second transition was in 1961 when the college was transferred from the Ministry of Industries to the Ministry of Education. The third transition came in 1963 when it was decided that NCA will be governed by a Board of Governors, formulated

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<sup>10</sup> For details see NCAA file no 80-E, Personal File of Professor Shakir Ali (Principal, National College of Arts)(Part-I, II, III, IV, V & VI), 1958-76, H-35.

<sup>11</sup> The early days of Pakistan aptly written about in the literary works of many celebrated writers such as Quratul Ain Haider, Abdullah Hussain and Intizar Hussain along with many others.

under the West Pakistan Educational & Training Institutions Ordinance of 1960. The fourth and the biggest shift came under Z.A. Bhutto’s government, when NCA became a federally administered institution, under the Federal Ministry of Education.

Going through all these set-ups or up-sets must have taken a toll on Shakir’s personal and professional life. Like a palimpsest, he let every experience write its own narrative on the surface of his being. It appears that in this role of an administrator, Shakir Ali reluctantly rationed his time, accommodating this new administrative persona with his creative avocations of painting, reading, writing, communicating with the country’s intelligentsia—his intellectual and artist friends felt his absence as a huge loss.<sup>12</sup>

### **Decisive moment in art education**

As the principal, Shakir Ali’s presence at the NCA was a decisive moment for the shaping of the domains of art and design, especially of art education in Pakistan. While he was called the ‘crucial watershed’ in art and design industry in Pakistan by some critics, Zubeida Agha, another torch-bearer of the modern art movement, believed that Shakir Ali did not rise to his highest potential as an artist because the principalship of the NCA, incompatible with any creative activity, pulled down his performance as a painter. In this respect she speaks of the sordid politics of the NCA and asks, how could an artist survive in the chair of principal?<sup>13</sup> Shakir felt himself that his holding the charge of principal had necessarily interfered with his teaching programme.<sup>14</sup>

It appears that Shakir Ali had a ‘deep patience and caring interest’ in his young friends-like-students. This connection paid off when he chose to create a team of young teachers who had just graduated from NCA. He felt that they knew and understood the ethos of the NCA and yet he consciously nurtured a culture of diversity and heterogeneity at NCA by bringing in Khalid Iqbal and Colin David from the Punjab University to teach fine arts.<sup>15</sup> Later on Mian Ijaz ul Hassan was brought

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<sup>12</sup> As narrated in Akbar Naqvi’s seminal book on *Pakistani Art, Image & Identity*. This book can aptly be described as the Bible of Pakistani Art, p.195.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> For details see NCAA file no 80-E, Personal File of Professor Shakir Ali (Principal, National College of Arts)(Part-I, II, III, IV, V & VI), 1958-76, H-35.

<sup>15</sup> Professor Salima Hashmi, a former principal of NCA in the late 1990s, reminiscing about NCA’s early days in conversation with Professor Nazish Ata Ullah, another former principal of NCA. This interview was published

on board as an Art History professor.<sup>16</sup> Ahmed Khan, an NCA graduate and later a teacher at the design department, while acknowledging the role, support and backing of the NCA headed by Shakir Ali in the movement for ‘modern art’ at the NCA termed it as Shakir Ali’s ‘mission’. Shakir, with his first-hand experience of modern art movements in Europe, made NCA the ‘temple of modern art in Pakistan’.<sup>17</sup> Here begin the inklings of what earlier was alluded to as ‘what Shakir Ali, the principal, was to NCA?’.

### **From original to new NCA-Vision**

The cumulative knowledge of the NCA archives, personal communication with the graduates of the first few classes of the NCA, own observations and experience of the present-day art and design instruction, the students’ theses-projects show that the NCA-Vision—from parallel industrial-design and fine art program to fine art-dominated—changed dramatically, but imperceptibly, during Shakir Ali’s tenure—the longest serving principal so far. The fine art-favouring traditions, established during his long tenure, took firm roots and were authenticated by the NCA principals who followed Shakir Ali.<sup>18</sup>

In my observation, this over-whelming fine art-oriented influence is so powerful that it has also impacted the teaching and studio-practices in the design and the architecture departments. And over the years, the NCA-Vision of an industrial and architectural design education that was aimed at accompanying the contemporary needs and tastes, while remaining grounded in the indigenous aesthetics, materials, skills, and socio-cultural conditions, has dimmed. The NCA, that was intended to pursue a distinct direction in art and design practices—explained clearly and amply in NCA-Vision—morphed into an art education institution where now the fine arts oriented regimen reigns supreme in almost all the departments.

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in *Sohbat*, a journal initiated in the tenure of Prof. Nazish ata Ullah. The deep and caring interest is also mentioned in *Image and Identity*, p.205.

<sup>16</sup> Interview conducted with Prof. Ijaz ul Hasan as part of my doctoral research and will be a part of my forthcoming dissertation.

<sup>17</sup> Akbar Naqvi, *op.cit.*, p.208.

<sup>18</sup> A fact verifiable by looking at thesis projects of the past many years. A critique of this very topic is included in my ‘conclusions’ section in my forthcoming dissertation.



## **Neglect toward homegrown design education**

The new system of governance under a Board of Governors came into place in 1963 as mentioned earlier. Probably not too convinced about the ever-expanding tilt towards fine arts, the newly founded Board of Governors (henceforth BOG) in a meeting held in 1964 laid great stress on bringing the college back to its original vision and asked principal Shakir Ali to introduce industrial design as a major subject in the then curricula of the college. It seems, from the NCA documents, that Shakir Ali agreed. But his preference for foreign faculty to accomplish this task required a long drawn procedure, for which he tried, but later evidence shows that those plans did not fully materialize.<sup>19</sup> Foreign faculty did come but for short periods and a meaningful impact could not be had.<sup>20</sup> In the meanwhile, the local permanent teaching staff kept teaching the existing courses meant for further up-gradation, the records of the course-outlines show, casually discarding some of the significant-original curricular components.<sup>21</sup>

## **Unqualified faculty**

The reason for this apparent, if not deliberate, side-lining of the NCA-Vision, and the identified casual fiddling with the curricula, or not dispensing quality industrial design education was due to the unavailability or the hiring of unqualified teachers. To cite one example, Professor Abbasi Akhtar, selected for the post of a design instructor, who later headed the department of design, had never studied industrial design. Her assistantship with James Warren, the Canadian professor of design, was thought to be enough qualification by the subsequent NCA authorities. Those faculty members, who were sent abroad did not or could not enroll for the design and architecture degree programmes due to inadequate academic training. These instructors, who returned after a year-long foundation-training only, were given the serious task of teaching on the basis of that year long training.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For detail see NCAA file no 80-E, Personal File of Professor Shakir Ali (Principal, National College of Arts) (Part-I, II, III, IV, V & VI), 1958-76, H-35.

<sup>20</sup> For details see NCAA file no. 240-E, Educational Assistants from the United States of America and other Foreign Countries(Part-I & II), 1959-61, H-30.

<sup>21</sup> For details see NCAA file no 163-E, Syllabus of the National College of Arts, 1959-82, H-13.

<sup>22</sup> For details see NCAA file no 181-E & 274-F, Personal File of Qadir Buksh (Demonstrator & Instructor, National College of Arts), 1959-63, H-23 and

### **Post-colonial politics of modern identity**

Instances like these surely hampered the NCA's growth in the established direction. To compound, other global developments shifted the balance of power in favour of the fine art track, which, in the ensuing years, had acquired a disproportionate status of a highly celebrated genre in the sphere of art and design education at NCA. Dr. Nadeem Omar Tarar researching the NCA of early 1960s, in his paper, 'Aesthetic Modernism in the Post-Colony: The Making of a National College of Art in Pakistan (1950-1960s)' terms the submerging and curtailing of the Bauhaus philosophy as 'one of the unintended consequences of concern with modern fine art movements in Pakistan'. He states that Sponenburgh's strong inclination towards serving industry through art and design education further disappeared in the context of the post-colonial identity politics of nationalism and modernization in a postmodern economic world.

Towards strengthening a claim in this direction, the NCA archives, my personal communication with the graduates of the first few classes of NCA, and the observation and first-hand experience of the present day art and design instruction and student theses show that the Sponenburgh led NCA-vision underwent many re-organisations and changes during Shakir Ali's tenure—the longest service time enjoyed by any principal so far. For this reason the traditions established during his tenure took firm roots and were deemed correct and authentic by his descendants in the chair of NCA principalship.

### **Disregard for homegrown design education**

Against this traceable backdrop, it can be argued further that the shift towards the 'modern' in fine arts in essence proved to be a 'forerunner of a movement', but indifference toward the founding vision damaged the country's hope of a home-grown design-based education in turn diminishing the scope of innovative and meaningful art and design practices and culture taking a whole-scale and widespread roots in at least Pakistani industry and urban cityscape. A responsibility that was intended to be handled by the qualified and qualitatively superior designers trained on the NCA campus.

### **Disregard for founding vision**

The various reasons for the eventual stagnation of the design department as well as the architecture department can be roughly ascertained by

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other personal files of the teachers. The details of all the files are provided in the 'List of Holdings' at the NCA Archives.

reviewing the official correspondence with the various government departments who dealt with the industrial design issues in Pakistan. Only six years after the inception of the college, it was stated very clearly that ‘our intentions, for the present, are not to produce experts in any one field. The design curriculum, therefore is fairly comprehensive so that the students acquire knowledge and experience of all these related fields’.<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, Shakir Ali declared, on behalf of the Pakistani Industry that ‘we are not prepared to consume industrial designers in various industries’.<sup>24</sup> Minute deliberation of the NCA archival documents shows that this situation of the neglect or confusion towards the foundational-principles of the premier art and design education institution, NCA, in Pakistan, continued in the forthcoming years.

### **Opportunities missed**

The central government decided to transfer the National College of Arts, Lahore to the Ministry of Education, Islamabad, on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1972. Subsequently a Board of Governors was formed which held its first meeting on 23 August 1972. Many sub-committees were set up to run the business of the board. The development plan submitted by the Teaching Staff Association (TSA) proposed to meet the shortage of teaching staff and raise the level of education by inviting professionals from advanced countries to teach, raising educational qualifications of the existing faculty by sending them abroad and last by bringing about a change in service rules, so that appropriate pay scales, medical and living allowances, insurance and pension rules may be put in place.

In the 1970s, when the NCA finally became a federal institution, the attention to the role of art and design education in the nation-building endeavours was floated by the freshly elected government of the Pakistan People’s Party. The need for an innovative national design and art culture took centre stage. The NCA was to be declared the ‘Centre of Excellence’, by the government. Due to the several mega art and design projects assigned to the NCA faculty and students, the NCA became the nation’s hub of the evolving Pakistani-design culture.<sup>25</sup> In these times a scheme for re-organisation of the NCA was created by the stalwarts like

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<sup>23</sup> For a detailed account of all the official correspondence see NCAA file no 80-E, Personal File of Professor Shakir Ali (Principal, National College of Arts) (Part-I, II, III, IV, V & VI), 1958-76, H-35.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Professor Salima Hashmi, in conversation with Professor Nazish Ata Ullah, This interview was published in *Sohbat*.

Nayyar Ali Dada and Kamil Khan Mumtaz who proposed to bring the NCA back on the track of industrial design education, and asserted that without an appropriate studio-based industrial-design education, the NCA wouldn't be strengthened solely from the fine art-propelled education.<sup>26</sup>

Despite these strong recommendations, the NCA-prospectuses of the years 1970-1976, including the samples of syllabi/curricula, confirm that the designated plans for an improved design education had actually never been initiated.<sup>27</sup>

### **Personal apprehensions**

These archival sources also show Shakir Ali's certain apprehensions of losing students to one particular popular branch of design. The rationale for this lapse given in Shakir Ali's times was that the industry had to develop first and only then the specialized courses could be taught. As a consequence, the later trajectories that the NCA design departments took—and to some extent the department of architecture too—indicated the lack of serious thought geared towards futuristic goals intended for advancing the cause of industrial design espoused in the NCA-Vision that has already been talked about. Ultimately, this approach hindered the development of the design department in a manner that it was not sufficiently conducive to train designers for the creative, functional, context-related design practices. In my view, the rationale that the industry has to develop first and foremost and only then the specialized courses will be taught was, inherently, a faulty one. All over the world art institutions have in the past, and in present times relied on educational programs that catered to the popular needs, improved popular imagination, and provided creative direction that led the industrial establishments and artistic faculties towards innovation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For a detailed scheme of re-organization from 1970s see NCAA file no 80-E, Personal File of Professor Shakir Ali (Principal, National College of Arts)(Part-I, II, III, IV, V & VI), 1958-76, H-35.

<sup>27</sup> I have carried out a detailed analysis of all the prospectuses from 1970 to 1976 and have come to the conclusion that there were absolutely no changes at all in the course structures, declared-objectives, departmental visions, curricula etc, that is included in the 'conclusions' section of my forthcoming dissertation.

<sup>28</sup> Curriculums of various design schools including RISD may be checked in addition to 'Harvard Report on the Arts', generated by Harvard University, USA. Available on the Internet.

## Conclusion

Finally, giving Shakir Ali the benefit of doubt, one may assert that institutions are not transformed by individual only. The changing socio-political-cultural realities that present newer opportunities to think, discuss, revise, alter and shift institutional focuses play an important role in changing the original institutional visions. Shakir Ali may have made this fine-art specific shift on the NCA campus due to these unspecified, unexpected or unavoidable temporal callings.

However, the accounts of the NCA’s official correspondence, as well as the overwhelming performance of the graduating students of NCA vis-à-vis the ongoing needs of the industrial and cultural sectors of Pakistan, in my opinion, begging appropriate and original-creative solutions, open critical vistas of thought about the role of art education, with the NCA at the center-stage, in a globalizing Pakistan. In this critical thought what occupies in my assessment, as one of the member of the Pakistani community of art educators, most importantly are the following points:

- 1) First is the genuine understanding of the industrial and cultural needs embedded in the original vision and the guiding mission of NCA, conceived by Sponenburgh—that it was conceived and fueled by the then and the future industrial needs, the cultural aesthetics, while adjusting with the ever-transforming imperatives of modernizing societies worldwide.
- 2) Second is to sift through and fully comprehend the circumstances and the resulting impact of the faltering of the NCA’s original vision, and bringing it to an ultimate halt the aims and mechanics of art and design education in an under-developed, South Asian Pakistan.
- 3) Third, is to reflect well on the quality of the performance and the role of the overwhelming majority of NCA graduates in the ever-growing national and international sectors of innovative art and design—sectors that are highly competitive, where artists and designers, originating from Pakistan, in whose art-design education the NCA serves as an unmatched role-model, have to play their respective roles adequately at superior standards.

But part of the initial question still perturbs me as an art educator: if the NCA was not meant to be an art school for the nurturance of fine arts only then why the original vision, that talked about the innovative artistic, industrial and architectural design practices in Pakistan, was so hopelessly neglected and not commented upon extensively by Shakir Ali and his successors? Of course Shakir Ali alone could not have decided which direction the NCA would take in the future, but the available

research sources, so far, lead to two assessments: Shakir Ali, perhaps inadvertently, fell prey to two confounding impulses:

- 1) in the post-colonial cultural sub-context of Pakistan, when it was considered fashionable to be *artist* in the modern-western sense, the original-indigenously drawn NCA art-design education agenda appeared dispensable, so it got aborted (albeit in stages—following other reasons for the eventual stagnation of the NCA design department that will be delved later in my forthcoming doctoral research).
- 2) The unavailability of the high quality reflective and intellectual input in a situation that the NCA, due to the sudden departure of Sponenburgh, was implicated in, left Shakir Ali in an intellectual and organisational conundrum he couldn't fix. So he reconciled.

There are no two ways about Shakir Ali's seminal and very valuable contribution to the field of modern art in Pakistan, as an artist, as an art educator and as an administrator. The question remains as to why a happy co-existence of art and design could not materialize on the NCA campus? It seems like a case of missing the intended project of introducing, refining, and establishing the practice and culture of art and design, in the larger and varied, rural and urban, contexts of Pakistan. The roots of the problems faced by the NCA design departments—and to some extent the architecture department—in the 58 years of the departments' existence are easily traceable via the examination of the NCA's original institutional vision and the actual academic-instructional methodologies present schemes on NCA campus. I leave this open question for myself and fellow researchers to pursue more wholesomely for clarifying: Who is Shakir Ali? And better still: Who is Shakir Ali to NCA?