

PAINTED THEMES IN TRUCK ART IN PAKISTAN: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study explore cultural symbols of truck painting art in Pakistan, a colorful and decorative tradition known for its bright designs, and detailed patterns. To understand its themes and influences, the research uses a simple approach: looking closely at truck paintings, visiting busy transport areas, reading existing books and articles on South Asian art, and talking informally with truck painters about their work and inspiration. The findings show that Pakistani truck art is influenced by many sources, including old fresco paintings, South Asian folk art, colonial-era art styles, and even some European artistic ideas. These influences mix together to give truck art its unique designs, stories, and styles, making it an important cultural symbol that is admired around the world.



INTRODUCTION

Truck painting art is a vibrant and colorful form of decoration practiced widely in Pakistan, where trucks and other vehicles are painted with bright colors, intricate patterns, and meaningful symbols. This art form is more than decoration; it reflects the owner's identity, cultural pride, and social values. The tradition of decorating vehicles in Pakistan can be traced back to older modes of transport such as carts, horses, and wagons, which were occasionally adorned with patterns and symbols (Schmid, 2000). Modern truck art developed in the early 1900s when trucks replaced these traditional vehicles, evolving into a distinct artistic expression. Pakistani truck art combines influences from folk art, regional motifs, religious symbols, floral patterns, and portraits of national heroes (Sheikh, 2018). Common symbols, such as birds, lions, and eyes, convey meanings of

beauty, strength, and protection. Today, truck art is internationally recognized as a symbol of Pakistan's rich cultural heritage and creativity. Studying this art helps understand local traditions, social messages, and the artistic innovation that transforms everyday transport into moving works of art (Zahraa & Abdullah, 2020). Excavation records show that decorating vehicles such as chariots, carts, and carriages began in Mesopotamia as early as 1900 BC (Piggott, 1969). Excavations show that ancient vehicles, like chariots and carts, were decorated with different materials, such as chains and leather belts. These were not just for decoration—they also helped support the vehicle. Similar suspension systems using chains were later used in Rome around the 1st century BC. This shows that people in different regions learned and improved ideas from earlier designs.

These findings tell us that ancient craftsmen were creative, combining beauty with practical use when building and decorating vehicles (Collon, 1997; Herrmann, 1992). Truck decoration in Pakistan started from the old tradition of decorating carts. This can be traced back to the 1900s, when trucks replaced older vehicles like carts, horses, litters, and wagons (Gupta & Aishani, 2016). Earlier vehicles had fewer decorations, mostly seen on royal carts in the early 1600s. Over time, decorations became more colorful and detailed, giving rise to the bright and cultural truck art seen in Pakistan today. Pakistan has a long and rich history of over 5,000 years, and its art comes from many different cultures and traditions. One of the most well-known and colorful art forms in the country is truck art (Elias, 2005). This type of art decorates trucks with bright, lively, and detailed designs that make the vehicles stand out on the roads. The patterns often include flowers, animals, calligraphy, and other symbols that show the local culture and beliefs. The use of many colors and intricate shapes makes each truck unique and full of life. Truck art is not only beautiful but also an important part of Pakistan's cultural heritage, reflecting the creativity and traditions of its people.

Trucks and Themes

It is important to explain which parts of the trucks are usually decorated. Trucks have three main sections: the **Taj** (front), the **rear** (back), and the **sides**. These sections are divided into smaller panels, usually square or rectangular in shape, and these panels are where most of the decorations and artwork are painted (Ansari & Nawaz, 2024). The top front part of the truck is mainly decorated with religious symbols, showing the owner's faith, especially Islam. This area is called the **Taj**, or "crown," and the designs are painted on the front rim. The side panels of the truck are divided into small sections, and each one is painted with different themes, like flowers, animals, landscapes, or popular cultural images. Every panel is unique, and together they create the bright, lively, and artistic appearance that Pakistani trucks are famous (Zahra, 2021).

Literature Reviews

Pakistani Truck Painting and Decoration Art

Pakistani truck art is a vibrant and culturally rich form of visual expression. It reflects the country's history, traditions, and social values. Scholars have studied truck art from various perspectives, including its historical origins, artistic styles, and cultural symbolism. The following literature review is organized into three main subtopics:

Historical Development of Truck Art

Truck art in Pakistan has its roots in older South Asian traditions of decorating transport vehicles such as carts, wagons, and horses. Kenoyer explains that these practices can be traced back centuries, where artisans painted simple patterns and motifs to adorn vehicles. When motorized trucks replaced traditional transport in the early 1900s, decoration shifted from carts to trucks, giving birth to a new form of artistic expression (Kenoyer, 2009). Initially, decorations were limited and simple, but over time, truck painting evolved into a complex art form. Grey notes that truck art gained popularity in the 1920s and 1930s, as drivers and owners competed to make their vehicles visually attractive. Trucks were seen not just as transport vehicles but also as symbols of social identity. Over the decades, the art form became increasingly elaborate, incorporating bright colors, detailed patterns, and meaningful symbols (Grey, 2016). Truck art is also linked to regional traditions. Different provinces of Pakistan developed unique styles. For example, Punjab trucks often display floral motifs and calligraphy, while Sindh trucks use more geometric patterns and landscapes. This regional diversity adds to the richness and variety of the art form, making each truck a representation of both local culture and national identity (Ansari & Nawaz, 2024).

Art Styles as a Stimulus for Truck Art

Truck art draws inspiration from several artistic traditions. Folk art, miniature painting, and calligraphy have all influenced the style and motifs seen on trucks. Zahra emphasizes that folk designs, including birds, flowers, and simple geometric patterns, are widely used in truck decoration. These designs connect the modern trucks to the cultural and artistic heritage of rural Pakistan (Zahra,

2021). Miniature painting, which flourished in South Asia over centuries, also influenced truck art. Detailed depictions of landscapes, historical scenes, and portraits are translated into larger, simpler designs suitable for truck panels highlight that truck painters often adapt these styles to fit the shape and size of trucks, combining traditional techniques with modern creativity (Ali, 2023). Calligraphy, particularly Arabic and Urdu scripts, is another major influence. Verses from the Quran, poetry, or personal slogans are painted to reflect the owner's beliefs, identity, or social messages. Kazmi explain that the combination of folk motifs, miniature-inspired imagery, and calligraphy creates a distinctive visual language that defines Pakistani truck art. The interplay of these styles ensures that each truck becomes a moving artwork, blending tradition with contemporary creativity (Kazmi, 2021).

Cultural Symbols and Meanings in Truck Art

One of the most important aspects of truck art is its use of cultural symbols. These symbols convey social, religious, and personal messages. Ahmed notes that the **Taj**, the top front part of the truck, is usually decorated with religious motifs to show the owner's faith. Eyes are often painted on the front or sides of trucks to protect against evil, while floral designs and animals symbolize beauty, strength, or courage (Ahmed, 2022). The side panels of trucks are filled with geometric shapes, landscapes, portraits, and popular cultural symbols. Khan and Ahmed (2015) argue that these decorations reflect the owner's identity, social status, and regional pride. Each truck becomes a canvas for storytelling, carrying messages about religion, society, and family values. Truck art also reflects local history and nationalism. Scenes of famous leaders, historical events, or national symbols are common. Malik emphasize that these visual stories make truck art a living cultural archive, preserving traditions and connecting communities. Through its colors, patterns, and symbols, truck art communicates cultural values and acts as a medium for social expression in everyday life (Malik, 2018). Pakistani truck art is one of the most colorful and famous art forms in the country. It is a mix of folk traditions, religious symbols, and local artistic styles. Rehman (2010) explains that truck art comes from the older practice of decorating carts, horses, and wagons in

South Asia. This tradition changed in the early 1900s when trucks started replacing these older vehicles. At that time, people began decorating trucks in bright colors and patterns, creating a new style of art. Khan and Ahmed (2015) note that truck art is not only decoration but also a way to show social and cultural values. The designs often include religious symbols, poetry, flowers, animals, landscapes, and portraits of famous personalities. The front part of the truck, called the **Taj** or crown, usually has religious designs to show the owner's faith, while the side panels show different shapes and themes. Each truck tells a story about the owner's beliefs and traditions. Hussain and Raza (2018) explain that truck art keeps old artistic traditions alive, such as folk and miniature painting styles. The painters, called **naqqash**, add their own creativity to make every truck unique. The bright colors, detailed patterns, and meaningful images make the trucks stand out on the roads. Truck art is also known internationally for its beauty and cultural importance. Researchers say it represents Pakistan's rich culture and history. It shows how everyday vehicles can become moving works of art that reflect society, religion, and local traditions (Rehman, 2010; Khan & Ahmed, 2015). Studying truck art helps us understand both art and the culture of Pakistan.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the cultural symbols and artistic influences of Pakistani truck art. The research focuses on understanding the themes, designs, and visual narratives present on trucks. To achieve this, the study follows four main methods. First, a **visual analysis** of truck paintings was conducted by examining the decorations, colors, patterns, and symbols directly on the vehicles. Second, **field observations** were carried out at busy transport hubs and truck stops to see how trucks are decorated in real-life settings and to understand regional variations. Third, a **review of existing literature** on South Asian art, folk traditions, and historical painting styles was undertaken to identify the artistic influences on truck art, including frescoes, colonial-era styles, and European motifs. Finally, **informal interviews with truck painters** were conducted to gain insights into their creative processes, choice of symbols, and cultural inspirations. These conversations helped to understand not only the

techniques used but also the cultural and personal meanings behind the designs. By combining visual analysis, field observation, literature review, and interviews, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the symbolic and artistic aspects of Pakistani truck art. The methodology emphasizes both the aesthetic and cultural significance of the art form, highlighting how diverse influences contribute to its unique style.

Results and Discussion

Discussion

Pakistani Truck Art through Sociological Views

Pakistani truck art, known for its bright colors, intricate patterns, calligraphy, and pictures of animals, people, or landscapes, is more than just decoration. From a **sociological perspective**, it is a reflection of society, culture, and social values. Sociologists study how art is shaped by social structures, traditions, and human interactions, and truck art is a perfect example of this. It shows how culture, community, and individual creativity come together to create something meaningful. Pierre Bourdieu's idea of **cultural capital** helps explain why truck art is important socially. According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital refers to skills, knowledge, and tastes that help people show their social status. Truck owners invest in decorations not only to make their trucks beautiful but also to show prestige, respect, and personal taste. A highly decorated truck is a symbol of wealth and social position. In cities like Karachi and Lahore, owners often hire professional artists to make unique designs, which shows both their economic ability and understanding of cultural traditions. From Émile Durkheim's point of view, truck art represents **collective consciousness**. This means it reflects the shared beliefs, values, and traditions of a community (Durkheim, 1912). Many trucks have religious verses, folk stories, or national symbols. These symbols are understood by most people and help connect them to their culture and society. Truck art, therefore, is not just personal expression but a way to reinforce social unity and preserve cultural traditions across generations. Another important sociological view is **Symbolic Interactionism**, which studies how people create meaning through symbols (Blumer, 1969). Each design, color, or image on a truck has a meaning, chosen by the artist and owner based on what they

want to communicate. For example, lions might represent bravery, while peacocks can symbolize beauty and pride. Truck art is a form of communication that conveys social messages about identity, values, and beliefs to everyone who sees it, including drivers, passengers, and pedestrians. Truck art is also connected to **economic and labor aspects**. Many skilled painters rely on truck painting as their main source of income, often passing their skills down through generations. This shows how art and economy are linked. Marxist theory explains that cultural products are influenced by economic conditions (Marx, 1867). Additionally, as truck art becomes popular internationally through exhibitions and merchandise, it shows how local culture can be transformed into economic value in the global market. Regional and ethnic identity also play a role in truck art. Pakistan is culturally diverse, and designs often differ by region. Sindhi trucks may have Ajrak patterns and traditional Sindhi symbols, while Punjabi trucks may use more floral patterns or folk stories. These differences show how art represents local culture and pride, and how communities express their identity through decoration (Khan, 2015). Truck art thus becomes a way of telling social and cultural stories. Gender is another aspect seen in truck art. Most drivers and artists are men, and many designs reflect masculine ideals such as courage or strength (Ahmed, 2012). Women are less visible but influence the art indirectly, often through floral designs or poetic verses. This shows how social norms and cultural values are expressed through the artwork. Truck art also works as a **means of social communication**. Trucks travel long distances, carrying symbols and messages across cities, highways, and villages. People from different communities can see these artworks and understand the cultural messages. In this way, truck art connects people, spreads cultural ideas, and reinforces shared social values (Mirza, 2018). In conclusion, Pakistani truck art is much more than decoration. It reflects **social status, cultural identity, regional pride, and shared values**. Sociologists like Bourdieu, Durkheim, and Blumer show that art is shaped by social structures, economic factors, and interactions between people. By studying truck art sociologically, we can understand how culture, society, and individual creativity work

together to create something meaningful, colorful, and socially important.

The study found that Pakistani truck art is a rich mix of colors, patterns, and cultural symbols. The visual analysis showed that trucks are decorated with bright designs, floral motifs, animals, landscapes, and calligraphy, creating vibrant and intricate compositions. Field observations revealed that truck designs vary by region, reflecting local culture, traditions, and personal preferences of truck owners and painters. Informal interviews with truck painters highlighted their inspirations and creative choices. Painters explained that many designs are influenced by **historical frescoes, South Asian folk art, colonial-era styles, and even some European artistic ideas**. They also emphasized that symbols, such as eyes, animals, and religious verses, carry meanings of protection, strength, and cultural identity. The combination of these diverse influences gives truck art its unique style and narrative. Each truck becomes a moving canvas that tells stories about the owner, the region, and the cultural heritage of Pakistan. Overall, the results show that Pakistani truck art is both an artistic and cultural expression admired nationally and internationally. The findings of this study reveal that Pakistani truck art is a unique blend of artistic traditions and cultural symbolism. The use of bright colors, detailed patterns, and meaningful symbols reflects both the creativity of truck painters and the cultural values of truck owners. This aligns with the observations of Khan and Ahmed (2015), who note that truck art serves not only as decoration but also as a medium to express social identity, regional pride, and personal beliefs. The study also shows that truck

art draws inspiration from multiple sources, including historical frescoes, South Asian folk art, and colonial-era styles. This confirms the argument by Rehman (2010) that Pakistani visual culture is deeply rooted in folk traditions and historical art forms. The incorporation of European motifs and contemporary design ideas further illustrates the adaptability and evolution of truck art, making it a dynamic and living art form. Religious symbols, such as Quranic verses and protective eyes, are commonly used, particularly on the front **Taj** of trucks, which resonates with Hussain and Raza's (2018) findings that these symbols reflect both faith and a desire for protection during travel. Additionally, motifs like animals, flowers, and landscapes communicate strength, beauty, and regional identity, highlighting how truck art functions as a visual storytelling medium. Overall, the discussion confirms that Pakistani truck art is not just decorative but an important cultural expression. It preserves traditional artistic techniques while adapting to modern influences and serves as a public display of social, religious, and regional values. These findings underscore the significance of truck art in understanding Pakistan's visual culture, social norms, and the role of art in everyday life.

Themes on The Truck Art

Religious Themes

The front part of Pakistani trucks, called the **Taj**, is often decorated with patterns and designs that show religious importance. Truck painters include images like the **Holy Kaaba, Madina Mosque, Quranic verses,**



and names or titles of the Last Prophet (PBUH).

PICTURE CAPTURED, Jun and Jul 2025

Figure 1: Showing Religious Symbols

Symbols Painted on Fresco-Style Trucks

One common symbol on Pakistani trucks is the **mosque**, or *masjid* in Arabic, which is a place for Muslim worship and community gatherings. Masjids represent devotion and respect in Islam. On some trucks, the mosque is painted as a central image. For example, many trucks feature the outline of **Lahore's Badshahi Mosque**, one of the largest and most famous mosques in Pakistan. Its Mughal-style architecture makes it a popular theme for decoration. The mosque is often shown in pictorial form to highlight its beauty and cultural importance. The Badshahi Mosque also functions as a **Jamia mosque**, serving the community for large religious gatherings, making it both a spiritual and cultural symbol on

truck art. These designs are not just for decoration—they also show the driver's faith and respect for Islam. Religious symbols have been used in many cultures around the world, and on trucks, they have a special meaning. For example, painters often start their work by saying the name of Allah to show devotion. Quranic verses and Islamic images on the **Taj** express the owner's belief and hope for protection during travel. These symbols are seen on trucks in all parts of Pakistan. The **Taj** is therefore both decorative and spiritual. It makes the truck beautiful while showing religious devotion, turning the vehicle into a moving symbol of faith and culture.

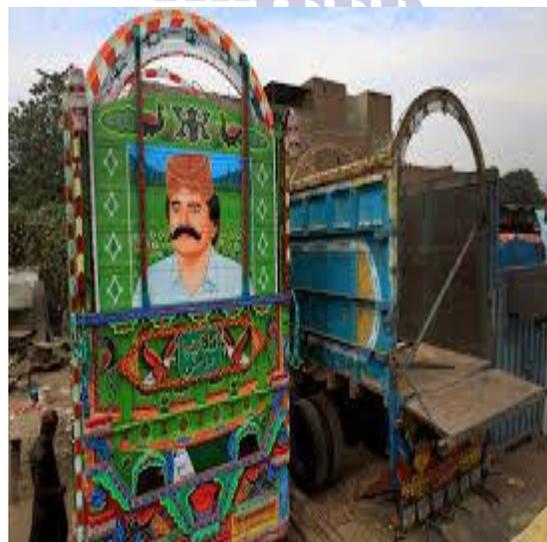
Figures 2: Connection with Local Personalities

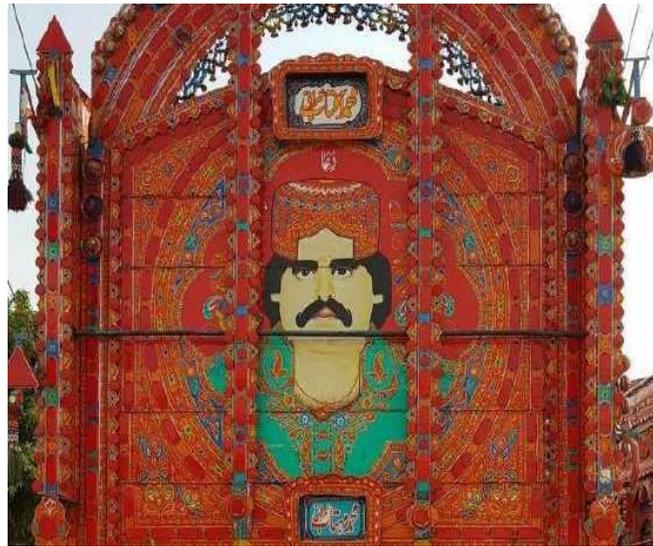


The second theme in truck art is showing a connection with famous people from the driver's region. This can include portraits of athletes who represent their area in national or international competitions, well-known scholars recognized for their writings, teachings, or interpretations, or politicians who contribute to the development of their

community or country. These images reflect the relationship between the person and the region, celebrating their achievements and showing pride in local talent or leadership.

Truck owners use these designs to honor important figures who have made a positive impact on their area. During fieldwork, interviews showed how and why truck owners choose certain





Personalities to paint on the back of their trucks. The back is the largest part of the truck and can display big paintings. According to the interviews, the choice of personality usually depends on the person's contributions to the development of their region or

country. These can include politicians, actors, religious scholars, or other people known for their hard work and achievements. Truck owners use these images to show respect and pride for these important figures.

Figures 3: Artistic Works in Different Areas



Figures 4: Truck Decoration In Sindh



In **Sindh**, trucks often have geometric patterns, landscapes, and desert themes, reflecting the natural

environment of the region. Artists also include images of local heroes and cultural symbols.

Figure 5: Truck Decoration In Punjab



Pakistani truck art varies from region to region, and each area has its own unique style and themes. In **Punjab**, trucks are often decorated with bright floral patterns, birds, and calligraphy. The colors are usually very vibrant, and the designs focus on beauty and elegance. Truck art often includes mountains, rivers, and traditional Pashtun motifs, showing pride in local landscapes and heritage. In **Balochistan**, trucks are sometimes decorated with tribal patterns, traditional designs, and symbols of strength and courage. The choice of colors, patterns, and symbols reflects the culture, beliefs, and lifestyle of each region. Overall, while all trucks share the idea of bright colors and decorative patterns, regional differences make each truck unique. These variations show how local culture, history, and environment influence the artistic work on trucks across Pakistan.

Conclusion

Pakistani truck art is a unique and vibrant art form that combines creativity, culture, and tradition. This study shows that trucks are not just vehicles for transport; they are moving canvases that display the social, cultural, and religious values of their owners. The decorations include bright colors, intricate patterns, floral designs, animals, calligraphy, landscapes, and portraits of famous personalities. Each truck tells a story, reflecting the personality, beliefs, and pride of the driver and the region to which they belong. The study also highlights how truck art draws inspiration from different artistic traditions. Folk art, miniature painting, and calligraphy influence the designs, while historical frescoes, colonial-era styles, and even European artistic ideas have also shaped the motifs and styles. Religious symbols, such as Quranic verses, mosques, and the **Taj** on the front

of trucks, show devotion and faith. Paintings of local heroes, athletes, scholars, or politicians connect the trucks to regional identity and community pride. Field observations and interviews with truck painters revealed that each design is carefully chosen to reflect meaning and beauty. Painters use colors and symbols not only to make the trucks attractive but also to convey stories and messages that are important to the owner and their culture. Regional differences in designs further show how local culture, landscapes, and traditions influence truck decoration across Pakistan. In conclusion, Pakistani truck art is more than decoration, it is a living form of cultural expression. It preserves artistic traditions, communicates social and religious values, and turns everyday trucks into moving works of art. Studying this art form provides valuable insight into Pakistan's cultural heritage, regional diversity, and the creativity of its people, highlighting why truck art is admired both nationally and internationally.

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