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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**The Influence of Colonialism and Racism on Pakistan's Visual Culture****Mamuna Nasrullah**

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Pakistan's visual art has been shaped because of the colonial practices of racism and discrimination based on skin color. As European colonizers governed, they decreased the use of pre-existing art forms in non-Western regions and set up European styles as the highest in their society. Berger states how people's ideas about color, race, and identity in art were influenced by historical, cultural, and political views. As a result of foreign occupation, Pakistani art was influenced to follow an artistic style important in European culture. Western cultural and beauty standards were elevated to be better than others after the growth in artistic thinking in Pakistan. Prejudiced ways of depicting people from other races in art during the colonial period formed the basis of current-day biases in Pakistani visual culture. The analysis looks at how colonialism affected Pakistani racial and color identity through the Western viewpoints included in Berger's theory of how men obtain political power through imagery. The project tries to understand whether Western influences continue to matter in Pakistani culture, seen from the angles of race and color and identity.

Keywords: Colonial, Racism, Discrimination, European Culture, Prejudice, Race, Identity.

Introduction

Visual culture in Pakistan still reflects its colonial roots, where social structure and artistic styles were passed down by both education and the media. The study suggests that using color to identify people by race in colonial times still affects how the public views issues of color, identity, and beauty in the present. Colonialism is still present in post-independence societies through images, where light skin is preferred, darker tones and indigenous looks are ignored, and symbols of color are commonly used.¹

The British did not only rule and benefit from India's resources; they also controlled the way people in the country saw themselves and each other. Those in control used pictures and arts to tell everyone they ruled over that they were better.² British colonialists made paintings, photographs, advertisements, and illustrations to depict themselves as enlightened and civil, but portrayed the natives as strange, unenlightened, or savage.³ In these visuals, the use of color was made especially significant. Light-colored people were often pictured as pure, clever, and modern, which were positive traits. In contrast, dark colors meant someone was uncivilized, dangerous, moody, or represented everything unlike white. The use of certain

¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 112–115.

² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 5–7.

³ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 45.

colors acted as a tool to spread colonial beliefs and formed the artistic and identity standards seen in Pakistan nowadays.⁴

Today in Pakistan, people still see the impact of these old colonial ideas. This can be seen in the use of skin-lightening products and by the fact that most models on TV ads are light-skinned.⁵ Beauty standards having light skin as a norm are part of a continued trend because of colonialism. The study compares both classic colonial art in Pakistan and contemporary images to find patterns of racial and color hierarchies in its visual culture.⁶

In order to explain how these systems developed and work now, the research depends on different theories from various fields. The book makes it clear that the way people see the world depends on culture, politics, and history.⁷ Berger, the “gaze” highlights the connection between looking and influencing the way those with power present images to the public. As a result, pictures in early colonial times would stress the idea of race and explain why the colonizing was right. They became so common that they had an influence on both public views and the colonized’s own self-image.⁸

As well as Berger, the study looks at Johannes Itten’s writings on color to explore how color carries psychological and symbolic messages in visuals.⁹ Itten underlines that color has meaning and can support people in forming opinions about morality, themselves, and their social role. Back then, both artists and advertisers often showed whiteness and authority with light tones, while darkness was related to unpredictable moods or being primitive.¹⁰ Such associations with color and race are still visible in Pakistani media today.¹¹

Frantz Fanon’s viewpoint, specifically expressed in *Black Skin, White Masks*, is important for learning the psychological effects of these visual systems.¹² In Fanon’s words, colonized individuals can be influenced to take on the colonizer’s views and style of life, sacrificing their identity and status. This explains why years after colonialism, Pakistanis still tend to prefer lighter skin and adopt Western appearance.¹³

Said’s Orientalism also gives an overview of how representing the East as special and lacking any value was crucial for European colonialism.¹⁴ According to Said, images were used to support and uphold the rule of powerful countries. Colonial art and cinema depicted the colonized people as very different and more primitive, and this image is still seen in media and works of art now.¹⁵

The study uses all these perspectives to create a detailed understanding of how color and colonial-era images in Pakistan still reflect the country’s racial ideologies. It considers how artists and media creators in Pakistan keep using or try to go against these existing structures. An analysis of colonial and current art shows how in postcolonial Pakistan, ideas about race, identity, and color have been and are still being created through artistry.

⁴ Johannes Itten, *The Art of Color* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1973), 17–22.

⁵ Bolo Bhi, “Pale Realities: Pakistan’s Obsession With Fair Skin,” *Bolo Bhi*, July 24, 2014.

⁶ Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 88–92.

⁷ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 7.

⁸ Ibid., 32–33.

⁹ Itten, *The Art of Color*, 15.

¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹¹ Rehman, “Fairness Obsession.”

¹² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 95.

¹³ Ibid., 116–119.

¹⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 10–11.

¹⁵ Ibid., 120–125.

Literature Review

Colonial rule changed more than South Asian economies and governments; it also managed to shape society's views of race through different visual materials. Through paintings, photographs, and advertisements, people's view of racial superiority was created and made to seem natural. In British India, which today covers Pakistan, these methods showed native people unfairly as being inferior, irrational, strange, or not progressing. These images were not only beautiful, but they had serious political effects and are still important for Pakistan's visual identity.¹⁶

John Berger, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon's theories, and Johannes Itten's perspective are brought together in this research to explain ongoing impacts. It explains that perception is not natural but is built by the ideas and systems accepted in society. By using the term "imperial gaze," Said explains how colonial subjects were often made to look like inactive "Others" in British paintings and pictures taken by ethnographers.¹⁷ Thanks to these images, Europeans got a certain view of the colonies, and the colonized people began to see themselves as inferior.¹⁸

Additionally, Edward Said's *Orientalism* describes in detail how Western views turned the East into a body that appeared to be different and lacking. In Said's view, illustrations, creating museums, and photography were the most important ways the empire was presented. Those representing the colonized in British India were highlighted by darker skin, flashy clothing, and strange settings. Because of these pictures, Western superiority was often emphasized, and this idea now appears again in how Pakistani media shows ideal beauty and culture.

This text becomes more detailed and touching because of Fanon's use of psychoanalysis. Through epidermalization, the internalization of inferiority, the colonized learn the values of the oppressors and start to view the color of their own skin as well as beauty standards in the same way.¹⁹ Here, fair skin and products to make it look that way are continually appreciated, as well as the stars who have that feature of beauty. They are the results of historical traditions that related whiteness to being well-off, modern, and clean.

Colonial and postcolonial visual culture can be seen through the formalist perspective Johannes Itten's *Color Theory* offers. Itten noticed that bright colors represent a clear and pure essence, while deep colors indicate possible fear or passionate feelings.²⁰ Such organizations were used in the colonial era to paint Europeans as fair and shiny and show Africans as dark and shadowy in British advertisements and portraits. Thanks to this kind of imagery, racial inequalities became naturalized, and now, skin tone remains a sign of rank, attractiveness, and respect in Pakistan's media and advertising.²¹

Experts and artists from Pakistan are now more aware of their cultural passions. Working on the Mughal or postcolonial themes, Rashid Rana and Shazia mock the idea of colonial aesthetics using graphics, satire, and references to Mughal painting traditions.²² Her digital mosaics and his reworked miniatures oppose any fixed definitions for races, idealized female characteristics, and the idea of being pure.²³

¹⁶ Nicholas B. Dirks, *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 3–10.

¹⁷ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 80.

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 93.

¹⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 93–97.

²⁰ Johannes Itten, *The Art of Color* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 11–13.

²¹ Anika Wilson, "Skin Tone and Beauty in South Asian Media," *Journal of Visual Culture* 12, no. 3 (2016): 240–252.

²² Hammad Nasar, "Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan," *Asia Society Museum Catalogue* (2009): 14–16.

²³ Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 178–180.

She too has linked old colonial images with the way people use media today. Most screen appearances go to fair-skinned models; companies still use fairness to sell products, and the way people view color shapes their self-esteem.²⁴ The way people see race in pictures came from the colonial ideas about racial representation.

Although artists and intellectuals are opposing them, colonial ideologies are deeply rooted in the way Pakistan narrates and visualizes its culture. Nonetheless, this history gives us an opportunity to adjust and grow. If visual culture in Pakistan explores visual symbols and forms of expression from its people, it can achieve decolonization, thus take control of its own identity and mean.

All these writers outline how the systems of visual control were set up, how they used images and colors, and how their aftermath can still be seen in current times in Pakistan. Berger discusses the influence of the gaze and visual elements; Said outlines how the empire managed to present the “Other” to the world; Fanon explores the internal adoption of these images and the resulting feelings; and Itten gives detailed descriptions of how color was used.²⁵

The integrated structure of the theory helps the research travel between colonial artifacts and modern Pakistani works, showing how attitudes toward race and color are the same. The study of contemporary art lets us explore how artists seek to break or challenge the established ways of depicting identity, bringing forth extra ways to think about what identity means.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, comparative, and interpretive methodology to examine how colonial visual practices particularly those embedded in racial hierarchies and symbolic color use have shaped and continue to influence Pakistan’s contemporary visual culture. The focus is on how representations of skin tone, racial identity, and cultural “Otherness” were constructed through visual media during colonial rule and how those visual codes persist, evolve, or are resisted today through both artistic and commercial visual expression.²⁶

The study closely explores six to eight chosen visuals, giving an equal number from the colonial period and modern Pakistan. The picture “The Memsahib and the Ayah” was painted in the 19th century by the British, and it highlights inequality of race and class by showing a white female British woman next to a black woman serving her²⁷. In another case, “A Sepoy of the Native Infantry” from the Illustrated London News (1878) portrays a native soldier as if he is an exotic and inferior figure.²⁸ In an early 1900s Pears Soap ad, being “white” is equated to behaving right and properly, showing the way industry advertising promoted racial prejudices.²⁹ In the same way, the portrait of a South Asian girl by Rudolf Swoboda (1886) plays on dark and sensual colors and an oriental look.³⁰ For these reasons, illustrations from the British Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, and Yale Center for British Art were picked because they use distinctive colors, various body postures, and compositions to establish racial differences and support the power of colonial rule.³¹

²⁴ Zoya Rehman, “Fairness and Femininity in Pakistani Ads,” *South Asian Popular Culture* 15, no. 1 (2017): 36–47.

²⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1–3. The “Other” refers to the way the West constructed Eastern societies as alien, irrational, and subordinate in order to justify colonial rule and maintain cultural dominance.

²⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 5.

²⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 5.

²⁸ *Illustrated London News*, “A Sepoy of the Native Infantry,” Yale Center for British Art, accessed April 2025, <https://britishart.yale.edu>.

²⁹ Pears Soap Co., *Pears Soap Advertisement* (1890s), A&F Pears Ltd. Archives, British Library.

³⁰ Rudolf Swoboda, *Indian Dancing Girl* (1886), Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

³¹ Yale Center for British Art, *Colonial India Collection*, <https://britishart.yale.edu>.

Alternatively, today's visual set consists of recent Pakistan art and imagery, which builds on or challenges these old traditions. Rashid Rana's work titled "What is So Pakistani About This Painting?" (2007) uses elements from both Western culture and Islamic designs to raise questions about fixed ideas about identity.³² In *Pleasure Pillars* (2001), Shahzia Sikander rethinks Mughal painting in her effort to question ideas popularized by Orientalists and those centered on fairness for beauty.³³ Veet Academy connected the idea that fairer skin equals self-confidence, goals, and being a modern woman,³⁴ while Fair & Lovely (now Glow & Lovely) TV commercial told viewers that skin whitening was important for reaching higher career goals.³⁵ The purpose of these contemporary images, chosen from the archives, exhibitions, and digital platforms, was due to their effect on many, their theme of colorism, gender portrayals, and identity after colonialism in Pakistan.³⁶

The analysis of them involves combining formalism and postcolonial theories. Johannes Itten's Color Theory sets out how the meaning of color can be understood in the posters' designs.³⁷ It is argued that Itten's beliefs about the meanings of light and dark tones are applied to the analysis of how visual culture represents identity and race. Using the concept of the gaze from John Berger, it is possible to look at images and artworks that manage and measure the bodies of people from various races.³⁸ It matters especially in the way camera, lighting, and framing interact to bring out more from the film than what is simply seen.

Initially, *Black Skin, White Mask* shows that Frantz Fanon's model of internalized racism is significant for thinking about the effect of visual media on the subjectivity of people.³⁹ Scholars now see the lasting popularity of fairer skin and the absence of darker tones in adverts as results of mental processes that started during colonial rule. Because of Edward Said's Orientalism theory, it becomes clear that visions of exotic women and tribal men are still reflected in the ways Pakistanis are portrayed in different media.⁴⁰

With the method focusing on six to eight key examples, both clear details and a wide subject matter can be considered. The pictures are considered together with the cultural ideas and systems that influenced colonial and postcolonial times. Thanks to this approach, the study can find consistency in the old use of racist images and names while also noting new trends in changing identity in current Pakistan.

Colonial Visual Practices and the Construction of Racial Hierarchies

Colonial Britain in the Indian subcontinent managed things beyond authority; perception was also part of the regime. Images created using painting, photography, and large-scale advertisements developed the perception British colonialists wanted for South Asians and formed the image South Asians had of themselves.⁴¹ Because of this system, whiteness was

³² Rashid Rana, *What is So Pakistani About This Painting?*, 2007, digital photomontage.

³³ Shahzia Sikander, *Pleasure Pillars*, 2001, watercolor and dry pigment on wasli paper, accessed May 25, 2025.

³⁴ Veet Pakistan, *Veet Academy Campaign*, Reckitt Benckiser, 2020, <https://www.veet.pk>.

³⁵ Fair & Lovely (now Glow & Lovely), *Glow & Lovely Advertisement*, Unilever Pakistan, 2019, <https://www.glowandlovely.pk>.

³⁶ Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 82–89.

³⁷ Johannes Itten, *The Art of Color: The Subjective Experience and Objective Rationale of Color* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1973), 15–22.

³⁸ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 7, 45.

³⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 112.

⁴⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 10–11.

⁴¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 6–9.

associated with a higher status, being clean, and civilization.⁴² In this sense, visual culture was used by the empire deliberately.

Representation of the “Other” in Company School Paintings

Throughout the East India Company years, Company paintings were made by Indian artists in partnership with their patrons from Europe. The style of these works usually retained aspects from the Mughal tradition, but the themes and interests the pieces depicted became more Western and colonial.⁴³ The purpose was to gather, systemize, and set apart both the land and the people as exotic. In the process, these images helped to portray South Asians as a group dressed in bright colors, bound by strict social laws, lacking in cultural progress, and distinct because of race.⁴⁴

Many people point to “Nawab with Attendants” (from the Lucknow school) as an example, which depicts the Nawab with his musicians and servants. Even though he is dressed stylishly and accessorized, the stillness and cool gaze of the figure suggest that it is simply for view. The people nearby are all dark and their features are simple, while their movements are downplayed.⁴⁵ By treating the ruler as a historical figure, this depiction gives the impression that the live monarch is the main curiosity for these films. He is not an actor, but he is appreciated as a figure in the cultural heritage from a distance.



Figure 1: Nawab with Attendants

Another example is the “Brahmin Scribe with Attendants” from Calcutta, which shows a writer close by two helpers. Whereas European paintings highlighted the personality and knowledge of the intellectuals, this painting makes them generic and similar.⁴⁶ Young Apollo’s dark color and fancy setting are made noticeable; his mental abilities are not detailed. These choices shown in many stories made it appear, in a gentle way, that South Asians kept to the old traditions, but weren’t leaders in new ideas.

By placing South Asians in scenes full of exotic decorations, cinematic South Asian characters were depicted as stasis opposed to Europeans.⁴⁷ Because they did not know the larger impact, artists helped form a set of images that served the empire’s aims and beliefs.

Colonial Photography and Ethnographic Cataloguing

⁴² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 112.

⁴³ Mildred Archer, *Company Paintings: Indian Paintings of the British Period* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1992), 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 24–27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, plate 14.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, plate 31.

⁴⁷ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 45.

In the mid-19th century, photography brought a more organized method of showing colonial ideas. They did not just take photos to record; they used them to manage and organize people.⁴⁸ The “People of India” series from 1868–1875 split communities into racial categories by using their caste, profession, or region.⁴⁹ The photos showed subjects against uncluttered backgrounds and with little personal features. Their bodies were tense, their faces were plain, and the pictures were usually matched with headings highlighting differences: “Banjaran woman,” “Pathan soldier,” “Brahmin priest”.⁵⁰ These images recorded people’s identity and turned them into objects to be studied.



⁴⁸ Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 38–40.

⁴⁹ William Crooke, *The People of India* (London: India Museum, 1868–1875).

⁵⁰ Pinney, *Camera Indica*, 41–43.



Figure 2: People of India

There is a clear difference between these pictures and modern British portraits. While British people were usually portrayed in a warm and relaxed manner, Indian portraits were done with harsh lighting that focused (highlighted) on the subjects' skin.⁵¹ Not only was their skin darker because they had melanin, but the photographic techniques and lighting raised the contrast as well. As a result, being brown was made out to be about hardship, strong feelings, and being less cultured than the British elites' smooth and calm appearance. By using this visual system, people could think science guided it and, at the same time, support racist thinking about different races. Representing Indians with only a few specific kinds of photos, the British kept South Asians in a certain cultural moment, supporting their authority.⁵²

Color Symbolism and the Morality of Whiteness in British Advertisements

Advertising in colonies helped shape people's beliefs so that being white meant being better, more refined, and more civilized than those of another race.⁵³ The easiest example is the Pears Soap ad that appeared in the 1890s. In some cases, a white child is seen cleaning the skin of a black child with soap as the homosexual stereotype is that white is pure and normal.⁵⁴ It is easily seen that the message links white skin with cleanliness, righteousness, and being up to date.

Another telling scene is one where a British soldier gives soap to a brown-skinned character, clearly showing that the colonized did not practice proper hygiene by themselves.⁵⁵ In both of these films, you notice that the "good" characters have light colors such as shining bubbles, white fabric, and lighter skin. In the before pictures, darker colors are used to capture skin that looks unclean and less than perfect, mixes of wild hair, and chaotic backgrounds.

⁵¹ Ibid., 49.

⁵² Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 97–101.

⁵³ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 207.

⁵⁴ *Pears Soap Advertisement*, British Library, c. 1890. Accessed April 2025.

⁵⁵ Ibid.



Figure 3: Pears soap advertisement

Such ads were not simply a way to promote the brands. What they communicated simply put is that light-skinned individuals corresponded with cleanliness, order, and beauty, but dark skin meant the total opposite. As a result, colonial narratives connected ruling with cleaning public areas and firmly believed that racial hierarchy was what was right and just.⁵⁶

Johannes Itten's ideas about colors can show the reasons behind these choices in art. Light colors tend to show peace of mind, spiritual clarity, and calmness, whereas dark colors suggest mystery, risk, and danger.⁵⁷ Through colonial art and images, these organizations were turned into tools to make some members of the colonized community prefer whites.⁵⁸

Although many visuals were made to reflect colonial ideas in Britain, some did contain small protests. Gaganendranath Tagore and a few other Indian painters exposed the issues of colonial mimicry using both humor and cubism.⁵⁹ Even though his paintings were made in Bengal, his work reflected that Indian artists were understanding how they appeared in images. There were not many of these acts and they did not affect a large group of people. Thanks to them, the groundwork was laid for movements that directly opposed colonial mindsets, mainly found in Pakistan after the country split.⁶⁰

Because colonial visual codes were used over and over, they slowly shaped South Asians' thoughts on beauty, race, and who they were. Eventually, color was regarded as an important part of society's values. In Western society, people believed that having fair skin showed your superior social class, degree of intelligence, and cleanliness.⁶¹ When out in the world, dark-skinned individuals were more often referred to as disadvantaged because they stood for work, tribal backgrounds, or rural places. Today, colorism shapes South Asia, and the market is filled with fairness creams while light-skinned models are chosen most often for media.

The term 'epidermalization' from Fanon is also fitting: people in the colonies felt required to judge themselves the same way as the colonizer did through racial appearance. Here, we can observe it in shopping for goods, forming one's self-image, choosing partners, and in art and

⁵⁶ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 212.

⁵⁷ Johannes Itten, *The Art of Color* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1973), 15–22.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922–1947* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 54.

⁶⁰ Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 88–90.

⁶¹ Zoya Rehman, "Fairness Obsession in Pakistani Advertising," *Dawn*, July 18, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1494922>.

literature. Even when trying to present a national image, colonial ways of portraying things are commonly seen. Faces that appear clean and have light complexion are often described as fashionable.⁶² The European influence is not the only reason Pakistani dramas keep using these visuals; it's because visual training in colonial times has become the norm.

Contemporary Echoes of Colonial Hierarchies in Pakistani Visual Media

Postcolonial countries like Pakistan are shaped for years by the social and cultural consequences of colonialism. How beauty, race, and identity were pictured in India changed a lot under British colonial rule.⁶³ This continues to be the case in Pakistani media, where fair-skinned people are usually glorified and associated with being successful.⁶⁴ We will study how the old racial differences have not disappeared but remain clear in advertising, TV, fashion, and other commercial images in Pakistan, using facts from recent media.

Colorism is a major sign of colonialism's impact on the Pakistani media industry. It is most visible in advertisements for skin-lightening items that keep dominating various forms of media.⁶⁵ Among other effects, such products aim to persuade people that being fair-skinned makes you more attractive, respected, and popular.

For many years, Fair & Lovely (currently Glow & Lovely) has been in the spotlight in Pakistan's skin-lightening industry, but many criticize it for endorsing the belief that having fair skin brings greater success.⁶⁶ Advertisements often show that women only obtain success in their careers and love lives after using the products, especially if they have darker skin. For example, an add shows a woman of color unable to get hired until she uses Fair & Lovely, which helps her feel confident and encourages her employers to hire her. It connects fairness with holding power and being successful, helping to solidify the idea that lighter skin goes with greater social status.



Figure 4: Fair and lovely advertisement

Another fairness cream that is well-known, POND's White Beauty, also relies on similar messages in its advertisements.⁶⁷ Most of the ads for this product picture darker-skinned women turning into women with lighter skin after using the product. They point out that

⁶²Areej Akhtar, "Mirror, Mirror on the Phone: How Social Media Beauty Filters Impact South Asian Women," *GenderIT.org*, Association for Progressive Communications, December 2, 2021.

⁶³Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 6–9.

⁶⁴Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 112–117.

⁶⁵Zoya Rehman, "Fairness Obsession in Pakistani Advertising," *Dawn*, July 18, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1494922>.

⁶⁶Fair & Lovely (Glow & Lovely), *Ad Campaign Archives*, Unilever Pakistan, 2019–2022. <https://www.glowandlovely.pk>.

⁶⁷POND's Pakistan, *White Beauty Campaign*, Unilever Pakistan, 2020.

having lighter skin is like being prettier and can help a woman become more successful in life. These images, in line with colonial ways of thinking, make people believe that dark skin is less valuable.



Figure 4: Ponds advertisement

In Pakistan's fashion and television businesses, having fair skin is still the most valued attribute. Fair-skin models and actresses have way more screen time than those with darker skin, who often appear in minor roles. Seeing white people as the ideal in western media carries on colonial values by molding only one narrow view of beauty.

In Pakistan's fashion industry, it is regular to watch fair-skinned models in the adverts, catwalks, and advertisements produced by designers HSY, Sana Safinaz, and Fahad Hussayn.⁶⁸ You can find that models wearing fair skin often symbolize elegance, luxury, and modernity in luxury clothing brands. Models with lighter skin wear rich and lavish outfits in Sana Safinaz print campaigns, underlining that having lighter skin indicates status and wealth.⁶⁹

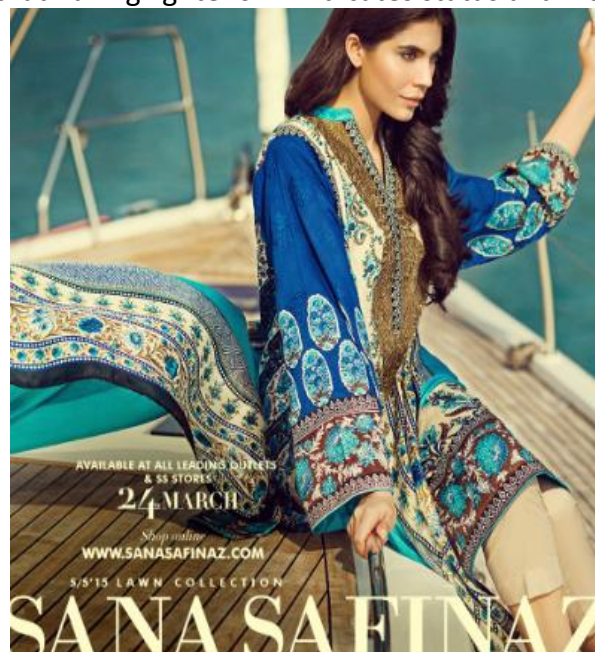


Figure 5: clothing shoot

⁶⁸ HSY, Sana Safinaz, and Fahad Hussayn. *Fashion Campaign Archives*, 2021–2024.

⁶⁹ Sana Safinaz, *Lawn Campaign 2023*, accessed March 2025, <https://www.sanasafinaz.com>.



Figure 6: Ramp Walk

This constant preference for light-skinned models in fashion advertising proves that colonial traditions of beauty still influence Pakistan's society. The fact that rare positive portrayals of dark-skinned persons are found in the media makes them often feel like outsiders. When it comes to fashion, fair skin is usually treated as normal, and darker skin is still left out of mainstream images.



Figure 7: Drama Parizaad

Parizaad (Hum TV), with Ahmed Ali Akbar in the leading part, explores colorism by presenting a dark-skinned poet who meets prejudice because of his complexion.⁷⁰ This shows that racial discrimination is still strong in Pakistan because of the influence of colonialism. The drama demonstrates, through Parizaad, that the impact of colonialism still directs how modern people see beauty, rank, and self-esteem, mainly because of skin color.

When Britain governed the Indian subcontinent, white people were treated as models of strength, purity, and brain power. People who colonized the Americas put forward racial ideas that declared those with darker skin were not as good or respected as the others. Not only did

⁷⁰ *Parizaad*, directed by Shahzad Kashmiri, aired on Hum TV, 2021.

these racist ideas affect how things were done politically and economically; they were shown in cultural images and art. After their independence, South Asians have still valued lighter skin over darker, and Parizaad reveals this fact through its portrayal of Parizaad, who faces discrimination because of his skin.⁷¹

The drama reveals how colonial ideas about race have lasted in societies after colonialism. Parizaad tells an important story about overcoming the challenge of being discriminated against because of having dark skin, which is still found in today's society. In Pakistan, those with lighter skin are commonly considered to be beautiful, more successful, and of higher respect, since these standards come from the colonial era.⁷² Although Parizaad has fine qualities and is respected, he still has to deal with prejudice because of his dark skin.

The debate over how the actor transformed his skin to suit the film shows that colorism is still a serious matter. Even though the makeup intended to show the character's dark experiences, it also mirrors the past practice of "brownface" in which someone would darken their skin to match a stereotype.⁷³ This situation proves that trying to solve colorism in Pakistan can be challenging because it may actually reinforce practices started by colonialism.

Persistence of Colonial Ideals in Commercial Imagery

Colonial ideas affect not only beauty and fashion companies but also commercial advertising in general.⁷⁴ In advertisements for luxury things, including cars and homes, companies pick models with fair skin to suggest affluence, achievement, and modernity. The fact that fair-skinned actors are still used in these roles shows that white skin is still related to power, prosperity, and privilege. Ads for upscale housing societies often show people with fair skin in their content. Most of the time, these ads have photos of models with fair complexions and families enjoying a life of comfort in stylish homes. Having light-skinned people in marketing for luxury and real estate sends the message that being white is linked to social status and wealth, a link that stems from the colonial era.⁷⁵



Figure 8: Home advertisement

In the same way, Car and mobile networks hey, usually pick fair-skinned people to show driving through picturesque and flourishing sites in their advertising campaigns. This clever advertising

⁷¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 116–119.

⁷² Areej Akhtar, "Mirror, Mirror on the Phone: How Social Media Beauty Filters Impact South Asian Women," *GenderIT.org*, Association for Progressive Communications, December 2, 2021.

⁷³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 116–119.

⁷⁴ Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 90.

⁷⁵ Bahria Town, *Marketing Brochure*, 2022

makes those who can afford it think that looking fair is an expression of wealth, status, and high-class living.



Figure 9: Jazz advertisement

Soft drink ads in Pakistan, including for Coca-Cola and Pepsi, usually have ads depicting fair-skinned, good-looking models in scenes that feel cheerful and lively.⁷⁶ As an illustration, a Coca-Cola add could present a fair-skinned lady sipping on Coke with a group of friends at a pool party, who are all fair-skinned. Using these images connects the product with happiness, success, and the living values that relate to fair skin found in Pakistani visual culture.



Figure 10: coca cola advertisement

Media Consumption and Visual Habits Formed by Colonial Legacy

This influence includes the way people from Pakistan watch and process media. Society's perception of beauty is shaped, and fairness is prioritized in visual media, because so many advertisements, television roles, and fashion campaigns rely on lighter-skinned people.

⁷⁶ Coca-Cola Pakistan, "Shadi Campaign," YouTube, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/cocacolapk>.



Figure 11: Instagram filter

Social media and its filters have led many to stay loyal to the idea of fair skin. On Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, many young women use filters that lighten their skin and help them look like what the media defines as beautiful.⁷⁷ Most smartphones have these filters that can change a user's appearance, making their skin appear paler and smoother. The popularity of these filters implies that the notion still exists in media that a light-skinned person is considered better-looking.

Bollywood is a strong influence on what is watched and listened to by Pakistanis. It is common in Bollywood movies for the main romantic characters to be fair-skinned, which promotes the belief that being white is what makes someone beautiful and attractive. Members of the younger Pakistani generations now watch Bollywood films and music videos, which teaches them to see fairness as a symbol of both success and beauty.⁷⁸

Artistic Resistance to Colonial Color Hierarchies

Rana is famous for creating works that examine how identity is broken up in today's complex global society. He gained attention for creating photomosaics, in which a big image is built from numerous smaller pictures. The way continents and countries break up and come together again in history reflects the mixed and broken identities formed during colonial times.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Areej Akhtar, "Mirror, Mirror on the Phone: How Social Media Beauty Filters Impact South Asian Women," *GenderIT.org*, Association for Progressive Communications, December 2, 2021.

⁷⁸ Arondekar, "Bollywood's Whitewashed Beauty Ideals," 166.

⁷⁹ Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2002), 88–91.



Figure 12: *Desperately Seeking Paradise*

In "Desperately Seeking Paradise" (2007), Rana combines digital images from modern-day Pakistan to reveal how the Western world's view of the postcolonial world does not match real life in the country.⁸⁰ His work suggests that colonialism breaks a person's sense of identity and that it also distorts how individuals or communities see themselves. Because of these visual tricks, the viewer needs to rethink how global, Western, and colonial influences play a role in shaping identities in modern societies.

His strategy of digital distortion in photomosaics further comments on people's overindulgence in Western consumer habits. Kara Walker's distorted pictures convey that as a result of colonialism, those in the colonized world have adopted the values and needs of Western companies, and lost a lot of their own cultural identity. His images show the ways in which colonial traditions still influence people's minds even after countries gain independence.

Through Rana works clearly questions the spread of American consumer habits worldwide. He uses images from Western countries as well as South Asian cultures to point out the differences between them. As a result of this, people can see for themselves the differences between local beliefs and the Western world's emphasis on beauty, which is often connected to colonial times.⁸¹ He considers how people in postcolonial countries can keep their traditions alive, despite the wide influence of Western consumer style.

Rana doesn't limit decentralization to artistic values, but also focuses on the strong influence of Western consumerism on people's identities in groups or as individuals. It causes the viewer to address the conflict between what the West believes and what was traditionally accepted among indigenous communities, and how colonialism impacts their ideas of beauty, success, and wealth.

Rana's work with the photomosaic challenges the usual Western way people look at other cultures. While other authors might describe Eastern cultures as firm and standard, Edward Said focuses on how they are flexible and can change over time. His use of distorted images matches the process of understanding and blending colonial histories, giving an identity with new and more thoughtful layers.⁸²

Shahzia Sikander's *Pleasure Pillars* (2001)

⁸⁰ Rashid Rana, *Desperately Seeking Paradise* (2007), digital photomontage.

⁸¹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 213–214.

⁸² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 52–55.



Figure 13: Shahzia Sikander's *Pleasure Pillars*

Through *Pleasure Pillars* (2001), Shahzia Sikander shows artistic rebellion by rejecting colonial color preferences and visual styles still in use today. By applying the forms of Indo-Persian miniature painting and distorting its imagery, Sikander expresses dissent against the colonial-era racial, gender, and orientalist ideas passed down to people. Her art does not aim to replace tradition but to smartly change tools from imperial classification systems into tools for thinking about the world from various postcolonial perspectives.⁸³

Pleasure Pillars gives you some first impressions of the arrangement and fine details found in Mughal miniature paintings. The painting is made up of women in elegant poses, similar to those seen in noble paintings.⁸⁴ Rather than staying true to the objects' first use, Sikander instead shows the women making decisions and acting in a mysterious and colorful way. Having a hybrid creature as companion, the symbol of the main image is meant to mask identity, represent people who have moved from one country to another and mixed cultural backgrounds.⁸⁵ The appearance of faces on their own and the mixing of mythical creatures with ornaments stands against colonial views that insist on classifying people by a single race or culture.⁸⁶

Many pictures from the colonial era, including Company School paintings and ethnographic photographs, showed South Asians as mysterious and unusual, showing their dark skin, fancy clothes, and staying still in the same pose.⁸⁷ Bright colors and detailed patterns are used deliberately by Sikander to break the usual art conventions. She does not adhere to the usual thinking that deaths should be bright and temptations dark.⁸⁸ Blending brown, crimson, indigo, and pastel colors within the same picture, the artist destabilizes the orderly ranking of colors and persuades viewers to think differently about how things are supposed to be seen. As a

⁸³ Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, 105–107.

⁸⁴ Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Lives and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2002), 107–109.

⁸⁵ Hamid Dabashi, *The World is Text: Writing, Image, and Power in the Work of Shahzia Sikander* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 187.

⁸⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 120–123.

⁸⁷ Mildred Archer, *Company Paintings: Indian Paintings of the British Period* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1992), 29–32.

⁸⁸ Johannes Itten, *The Art of Color* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1973), 15–22.

result, this blending of two musical styles weakens the colonial idea that attached worth to people's racial appearance.⁸⁹

The name "Pleasure Pillars" is actually very ironic. It excites imagery of harems and the excitement at the Turkish court, known through 19th-century art from the UK and France.⁹⁰ In doing so, Sikander points out the abuse of Eastern women's bodies, which were used to represent passive colonized regions seen by Eastern femininity.⁹¹ Even so, Pleasure Pillars does not view women as tools for men's gratification. As a result, these feelings are not manageable, but scattered, varied, and hard to recognize. The lack of clarity accomplishes the opposite of colonialism: It offers a twisted story and refuses to present a fixed character, emphasizing instead the existence of various layers in these people.⁹²

Fighter jet at the top marks the painting as a commentary on the relationship between global soldiers and postcolonial countries.⁹³ With this inclusion, one can see the connection from the colonial past to the neocolonial present and witness how South Asian bodies are still watched and give rise to racial issues. The presence of a green bird, especially in close proximity, might refer to a spiritual ascent or an attempt to move somewhere. They show that colonial visibility is alive today in media, conflict, and in the style of global capitalism.

Using the traditional wasli paper for miniature painting symbolizes Sikander's approach to politics. While colonial leaders took over miniature painting to show their power, Sikander turns it into a way to resist. She challenges the clear and forceful qualities here by breaking up the image, overlaying it, and making it unclear. Her images lack description; sometimes their faces are repeated or absent, and their movements make it hard to tell a story straightforwardly. As a result, Pleasure Pillars gathers images that represent postcolonial life, filled with memories, breaks, differing identities, and acts of resistance.

Resisting the color hierarchies of colonialism, Shahzia Sikander stands with others such as Rashid Rana and Shazia, who look at history with the goal of changing rather than repeating its story. In her practice, she fights for the right to remain mysterious, conflicting, and free in her artistic approach. Sikander uses feminist, diasporic, and surreal approaches to mix legacy forms, colors, and symbols with miniature art, making the tradition a way to express decolonization.⁹⁴

Conclusion

Even now, the art and media of Pakistan reflect the biased, racially charged views that existed from Britain's colonial rule. With the help of different theories by John Berger, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Johannes Itten, this research reveals that colonial rulers-controlled people and their perceptions of others and themselves. Whiteness was made to look modern and important in colonial art, photography, and advertising while ethnic Americans were painted as backward, strange, or unchanging. The codes remained at independence and have developed in today's commercial, artistic, and media worlds.

Still, colonial ways of seeing have faced challenges over the years. By being critical and changing traditional forms, Rashid Rana and Shahzia Sikander from Pakistan are challenging the old themes. They choose not to follow the fixed patterns of colonial times, preferring to display

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 207–212.

⁹¹ Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible*, 111.

⁹² Dabashi, *The World is Text*, 189.

⁹³ Sikander, *Pleasure Pillars*, 2001 (visual analysis).

⁹⁴ Sikander, *Pleasure Pillars*, 2001 (visual analysis).

both the diversity and control of cultures instead. This study promotes refining the idea of Pakistani visual culture by helping people notice connections to colonization and at the same time, reclaim an identity formed of many cultural influences.

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