

Paper title: Shattered Objects: artifact and icon in Islam

Key words: Iconography, Shi'as, production, love, work

Author name: Sarover Zaidi

Institute: Max Planck Institute, Department of Religious Diversity, Gottingen, Germany.

Supervisor: Prof. Peter Van der Veer

Email Id.: sarover@gmail.com

This paper is an attempt to trace the production, consumption and circulation of religious artifacts in the context of Islam. Islam has a highly contested history of iconoclasm, and does not permit the usage of idols, images or icons in its formats of worship, it is in abidance with this principal that innumerable techniques of worship have been devised, which point to a formless god. Through devices such as geometry (reflected best in mosque architecture such as *muqarnas*, *mihrabs* and tiles), through posture in prayer (*namaaz*), and simpler everyday objects such as amulets, idols, and colours, this genealogy of iconoclasm is continuously interrupted, contested, or managed in permissible forms.

In this paper I trace how Shi'a Muslims deploy varying forms of veneration to the prophet's family, working with artifacts in the form of sacred symbols, images, and architectural structures to enter into a relation of piety with them, yet remaining within the fold of Islam. Objects such as the Fatima's hand, replicas of the graves of the prophet's family, the sword and horse of Ali, along with colours (black, green and turquoise) are deployed in acts of worship during the month of Muharram and otherwise. An elaborate performance of veneration and circulation is enacted on the basis of these objects, which also becomes contentious in the Shi'a, Sunni debates on idolatry in Islam.

The central thread to this production and consumption debate is held at the figure of the 'artisan' and the 'mason', who participates in this debate, by seeing himself, as not only doing

the work of god, but also traverses the dilemmas of the craftsmanship located at piety, materiality, measurement, monetary matters and modernizing techniques of production. This paper would be an attempt to unpack these epistemic moments in the ideas of use, design, craftsmanship, and worship in the contexts of the religious.

At the theoretical level this paper wishes to address the larger debate on the study of religious iconography. Functioning as an ideological stance, this debate ensues to separate, word from image, the signifier from the signified, and the material from the ontological. This separatedness, becomes foundational in how it comes to see the relationship of icons with those who deploy them. Originating from Christian doctrines, where 'consubstantiation' replaces 'transubstantiation', and the world is rendered in symbolic forms only, it creates the plane for a new regime of thinking, language, and meaning, and their relations with the material world (Uberoi;1978), (Mitchell; 1987) (Pels;2013). My aim would be to place my arguments on religious iconography within Islam, with reference to such debates in the history of iconography.