



SAJAWAT

A Study of Truck Art in India

DISCOVER INDIA PROGRAM - 2020



Sajawat: A Study of Truck Art in India

Discover India Program 2020.

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report titled “*Sajawat: A Study of Truck Art in India*” submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

Sr. No	NAME OF THE STUDENT	DESIGNATION	SIGNATURE
1	Kavish Sanghrajka	Group Representative	
2	Aanchal Pannu	Content	
3	Ira Shah	Documentation	
4	Kapish Agarwal	Content	
5	Karan Palod	Documentation	
6	Kushal Shah	Content	
7	Mannat Dutt	Content	
8	Ojaswsi Kejriwal	Documentation	
9	Rishabh Jain	Logistics	
10	Riya Davda	Creative	
11	Sarah Gazdar	Content	
12	Sarvesh Gujarathi	Documentation	
13	Sejal Mehta	Logistics	

14	Sudeeksha Hedge	Finances	
15	Vidushi Tankaria	Documentation	

Mentor Name: Dr. Dwarika Prasad Uniyal, Professor and Dean, Faculty of Business

Signature:



Date: 24/03/2020

CONTENT

Acknowledgements	vi
Abstract	vii
List of Illustrations	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction to Truck Art	1
<i>i) Introduction of the Topic</i>	
<i>ii) Research Statements and Questions</i>	
<i>iii) Research Methodology</i>	
<i>iv) Ethical Overview of the Study</i>	
Chapter 2: Literature review	10
<i>i) Introduction to Scholarship on Truck Art</i>	
<i>ii) Pakistani Scholarship</i>	
<i>iii) Indian Scholarship and Gaps in Literature</i>	
Chapter 3: Syntax and semiotics of Indian Truck Art	20
<i>i) Categorisation of Motifs; The “What”</i>	
<i>ii) The Placement of Motifs; The “Where”</i>	
Chapter 4: Symbolisms and Driver Association	32
<i>i) Associations of Stakeholders with Truck Art and their Intentions.</i>	
<i>ii) Other Factors</i>	
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	50
References	53

Acknowledgements

This study of truck art, entitled ‘Sajawat: A Study of Truck Art in India’ would not have been possible without the constant support, guidance and contributions of numerous individuals. Needless to say, research studies like ours entail extensive gratitude in their very existence. In this note, we would like to extend a miniscule token of gratefulness to all the people we owe the outcomes our success to. On the outset, we would like to thank our faculty mentor, Prof. Dwarika Prasad Uniyal (Dean, Faculty of Business) for his able guidance and consistent support. His expertise, both on and off field and in theoretical and practical affairs, has been and will always be a beacon of inspiration.

Furthermore, this study of truck art could not have been possible without the uncompromised access that the entire team received on field. A large number of members from the trucking community opened their hearts and their places of work for us. We would like to begin by thanking Mr. Nafees Ahmed Khan (a renowned artist) for his constant advice and presence throughout our visits to locations, known and unknown. We are also thankful for his constant information and unwavering support during the pre-field preparations for the project. His contribution towards preserving the art on the trucks of India is unmatched and irreplaceable. We also thank Mr. Shafeeq, Mr. Irrfan Pathan, Mr. Aziz Patel, Mr. Honey Singh, Mr. Luv Agarwal and many owners of wonderful truck-building workshops for accommodating us into their schedules of business. We hope that their sacrifices in helping us work are justified by the outcomes generated. Amidst all, the inputs and patience of our subjects and other participants cannot be left behind. Our understanding of Truck Art could not have been completed without the profound knowledge of expert artists. The perspective shared by Mr. Wajid Khan, at the very beginning of our journey, made a significant impact on our ideas behind this study. In this process, we cannot miss out on multiple individuals from Indore for their hospitality and affection. The city did secure an extremely special place in the hearts of each team member.

Finally, we would like to thank FLAME University and the vision of its founders for an idea as great as the Discover India Program (DIP). Our deepest appreciation lies with the entire DIP committee and its Chairperson Prof. Kunal Ray, for making this an experience that leaves us in love with research and scholarship. Special thanks to all members of the FLAME faculty and community for making the program a memorable and cherishable experience. We also thank external/internal faculty and experts for their guidance through stellar instructions during the

multiple masterclasses. The benefits of your invaluable experience is beyond description. While limited by our memory, we are not limited by our gratitude. We are sincerely indebted to all others who have contributed to the study in their respective capacities. Beyond all, we thank each one of yourselves for bestowing upon us the power of honest, unbiased inquiry. We hope we stay true to your expectations. Once again, thank you!

Abstract

India is known for its massive road transport industry and the large number of trucks on its highways. A symbol of movement for most, these trucks represent the stories, journeys and destinations for the multiple stakeholders of this industry. As a result, their interactions with the trucks are the most profound. These interactions directly impact the ways of analysing all that one associates with trucks. One of the most prominent elements of them being the vibrant art decoration and art that they carry. Generally viewed as a method of filling empty space, truck art appears to possess many psychological, social and practical functionalities for the vehicle's owners, drivers and the artists. Furthermore, the implicit formalisation and associated meanings render it as a mouthpiece of the trucking community.

Researchers in multiple countries of Asia, like Pakistan and Afghanistan, have identified and studied this unique medium of communication; and eventually not only deciphering messages but also identifying set paradigms for efficient representation. Scholarly attention to truck art in India has been rather limited since its inception. Extensive depiction in popular culture has significantly subdued the other meanings of.

This study of truck art in Indore, a north Indian city in the state of Madhya Pradesh which is a junction on the national highway circuit, provided essential insights into the meaning and symbolism and present within truck art. Further, this symbolism is directly related to the associations and relationships the stakeholders of truck art - truck drivers, owners and arts - have with the art. They further depict the political, social, religious, geographical, and cultural identities of these individuals.

Finally, a semiotic analysis of multiple trucks on the highway highlighted a general syntax of truck decoration. Various symbols, motifs and phrases that constitute truck art in India are placed in a certain format that influences truck art, its meaning, symbolism and semiotic relevance. Understanding the contextual importance of the various symbols exposed us to the lived experiences and journeys of a large community.

Keywords: Truck Art, Syntax, Semiotics, Trucks, Decorations, Symbols, Indore, India, Vehicular Art, Truck Drivers.

List of Illustrations

- Figure 1.** A photo of the back and side of a decorated truck in Indore. Page 2
- Figure 2.** A photo of the Devil hanging from the back of a truck. Page 23
- Figure 3.** A portrait of the Sikh symbol of the Hawk on the side of a truck; A portrait of a cow, feeding milk to her calf painted beautifully on the side of a truck. Page 24
- Figure 4.** A photo of the side of the truck adorned with Non-religious decorations; A photo of the back of a truck highlighting Maharana Pratap in beautiful calligraphy. Page 26
- Figure 5.** A photo of the back of a truck in Indore decorated with colourful motifs. Page 26
- Figure 6.** A photo of the back of a truck decorated with peacocks. Page 29
- Figure 7.** A photo of the cabin of a truck in Indore. Page 31
- Figure 8.** A photo of bangles hanging inside the cabin of a truck; A portrait of a design on the inner ceiling of a cabin of a truck. Page 32
- Figure 9.** A photo of the side view of the head or face of a truck in Indore. Page 38
- Figure 10.** A photo of a driver enjoying his leisure time in the cabin of his truck. Page 40
- Figure 11.** A portrait of a worker assembling various parts of a truck in a workshop in Indore Page 46
- Figure 12.** A portrait of a truck artist alongside his intricate work on the side of a truck in a workshop in Indore. Page 47

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction of the Topic

While travelling on a commercial highway in India, one cannot ignore the extent of the role that trucks play in keeping the nation and its growing economy running. The trucking industry has been an important pillar in the story of India's exceptional economic growth: it currently carries a majority of the freight in the country. Furthermore, 69% of all freight that was carried in the year 2018-19 was carried by road, with the trucking industry carrying a majority of that. (National Transport Development Policy Committee & Routledge, 2014; Economic Survey 2018-19, 2019). Without these trucks and their drivers covering the vastness of India's lands, reaching everywhere from the mountains of Kashmir to the heartlands of Kerala, from the hilly expanses of the East and the North-East to the plains of Gujarat and Rajasthan in the West, India's economy will come to standstill. Trucking is a critical occupation that serves as the backbone of the flow of goods and freight in the country.

It is in this context in India that trucks occupy a multifaceted role. Alongside their conventional roles, they serve as large canvases that showcase a distinctly Indian identity in all its glory. They act as bridges between urban and rural India and they provide livelihood and a source of income to millions of people in the country. Painted in bright colours, adorned with symbols as diverse as the country they travel in, these trucks serve as distinct reminders of India's vibrant art and culture.

Every single truck that is seen on India's roads is unique in its appearance and its messaging, containing highly personal and contextual messages that are of most significance to the stakeholders directly involved in the process of the building, decoration and running of these trucks. However, the impact of the art and decorations on these trucks is far more than just on the people who are directly or indirectly employed in the trucking and related industries. It expands to include those who interact with these moving canvases on a daily basis.



Figure 1. A photo of the back and side of a decorated truck in Indore.

India's exorbitantly painted and beautifully ordained trucks have long been a part of the collective consciousness of the populous. Being a key marker of "Indianness" and identity, truck art has been heavily referenced in popular culture from highly decorated trucks being featured in Bollywood films and songs. Elements of truck art are used in a wide range of posters and advertisements in India, and by brands using them as markers of Indian culture to sell products to largely upper-class audiences. All these practices aim to build upon direct associations of truck art with Indian culture within the minds of Indians.

The associations of truck art with Indian culture are a result of the pervasive nature of the role of trucks in India. Firstly, the sheer number of trucks plying in the country, 3.9 million trucks as of 2016 (Ministry of Road Transport and Highways), ensures that trucks occupy a large space in the minds of every citizen of India: they're seen by citizens throughout the country, on a daily basis. In fact, it is almost impossible, especially in urban spaces such as cities with more developed road networks, to have a day go by without them seeing multiple trucks plying on the roads. Furthermore, since trucks carry goods to corners that are underserved or unserved by railways, their impact even on rural communities in terms of access to goods and capital is significant.

Equally as important is the fact that these trucks carry a visual language and messages that are distinct to these vehicles and to truck art in this country. The bold fonts and typefaces that are

used in the writings on trucks, phrases such as “Horn Please” and “Use Dipper at Night”, symbols such as the Indian flag accompanied with the words “National Permit” or “All India Permit”, the one-liners and poetic messages seen on the back of trucks and the vivid paintings depicting a wide range of objects and scenarios, have collectively carved a distinct identity of truck art that any layperson can recognize without analyzing the elements of the Art itself. Across all variations in geography and religion, Indian truck art has a distinct visual language that is discernible by any person, irrespective of their relationship with the trucking industry.

Thus, it is in this context that this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of truck art in India; its language, practices, contributors, idiosyncrasies and its relationship to the main pillars of the trucking industry, along with the truck drivers that inhabit these congruent carriers of art, culture and the economy and drive these trucks day in and day out to ensure that India’s economy doesn’t come to a grinding halt. Here, it is key to understand truck art not, only as a standalone cultural phenomenon with its nuances and practices, but also to understand the larger trucking industry in India to effectively contextualize the findings of this study to the realities of the lives and experiences of the stakeholders within this industry.

Historical Overview of the Topic

The truck art that is present in India and Pakistan today has a common origin point in pre-partition India as a result of the commonalities between the cultures and a shared history of the two nations before British India’s partition (Madan, 2018). Thus, the origins of truck art in the subcontinent can be traced to two separate inflection points in the subcontinent’s history. In the 1920s, buses and British Bedford trucks were imported in India for the first time (Steward, 2018; Adnan, 2014).

The first inflection point was when bus operators such as the Kohistan Bus Company and Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport who were among the first bus operators in India started operating in 1920s with the first imports of these buses. In the following years, competition increased exponentially and many such operators sprang up in the subcontinent, and they started the practice of decorating their buses in order to create a unique identity for their brands and attract more customers with their vividly decorated buses (Adnan, 2014). For this practice, these operators employed artisans who had previously worked on the decorations in temples, carriages and royal palaces (Adnan, 2014).

Around the same time, Bedford trucks were becoming enormously popular within the subcontinent. The practice of modifying the cabins of these trucks by constructing intricate wooden crowns on the tops of their cabins started as these trucks started becoming popular (Steward, 2018). When trucks started embarking on longer journeys in the 1940s, truck companies started adorning their trucks with their own, individualized logos that signalled the ownership of the truck art to the people who saw these trucks, irrespective of whether they were literate or not. These logos and decorations became increasingly complex and ornate over time, becoming badges of competition similar to decorations in buses at the time (Steward, 2018). As these Bedford trucks were extremely popular, Hindustan Motors started assembling these trucks in India in 1948 (Muthiah & Gopalan, 2013). In Pakistan, the indigenous assembly of these trucks started in the 1950s (Haroon, 2018). These vehicles became popular because they were extremely well suited to navigate the relatively poor roads of India and Pakistan.

The contribution of these trucks in shaping the phenomenon of truck art and its practices in both India and Pakistan cannot be understated. Especially in Pakistan, most people still associate trucks and truck art with Bedford trucks and their distinguishable design and features, even though their production was discontinued in 1986 (Adnan, 2014). In India, the Bedford trucks formed the foundation for the designs of future generations of trucks produced by indigenous manufacturers and design elements from generations of Bedford trucks are still prevalent in a majority of Indian trucks. Thus, even in India, associations of truck art are still largely influenced by these legendary trucks. The divergences in truck art practices of India and Pakistan started in the post-partition period, and were a result of numerous factors such as the impact of religion, legislation and variations in language and regionality on truck art. This has led to the truck art of each country gaining its own distinct characteristics and variations within the countries.

Today, Indian and Pakistani truck art are extremely different in their decorations and styles. The sheer expanse of India's geography has led to large variations in truck art within the country itself. For example, one of the most important factors that has shaped the differences between Indian and Pakistani truck art is legislation. In India, laws and legislation such as the Central Motor Vehicles Act (1989) and the Code of Practice for Construction and Approval of Truck Cabs, Truck Bodies and Trailers amongst others, have been critical in shaping the designs of Indian trucks.

The trucking industry in India is heavily regulated with a slew of red tape dictating norms on everything ranging from what is and isn't allowed to be painted on trucks to their maximum

loading capacity. Thus, in Indian truck art there is an equal emphasis on displaying critical information on trucks as there is on ornately decorating them. Phrases such as “Horn Please” and “Use Dipper at Night” that are closely associated with Indian truck art stem from legislation having required for their placement on trucks. On the contrary, Pakistani truck art is home to far more extensively decorated trucks with little to no regulation by the state on truck art.

Interest in studying truck art initially developed in the 1970s, in Afghanistan (Elias, 2003; Madan, 2018). While truck art around the world started being studied by researchers, ethnographers, journalists and filmmakers alike from this time, Indian truck art was largely untouched. In fact, while the study of truck art in Afghanistan and Pakistan progressed extensively since the 1970s, research on Indian truck art has only begun recently. Thus, there is a large gap in the understanding of Indian truck art, especially from the partition till the 2010s when authors such as Madan (2018) and Konstantin (2018), filmmakers such as Shantanu Suman (—) and photographers such as Ecstein (2014) started conducting research on Indian truck art.

Geographical Information

In conducting preliminary research for this study, we identified three potential locations for conducting our primary research: Amritsar in the state of Punjab, the National Capital Region (NCR) and Indore in Madhya Pradesh. This shortlist of sorts was assembled on the basis of conversations with primary contacts such as truck artists and truck owners operating in these places. We decided to visit Indore, the capital of the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, for conducting our primary research, because of a multitude of reasons.

Firstly, an overview of the already conducted research on truck art in India showcases that primary focus has largely been on truck art practices in the National Capital Region (NCR) and the states of Punjab and Haryana, with the rest of the country largely being ignored. Furthermore, the truck art in Punjab and Haryana closely resembled the truck art of the Sindh Province of Pakistan, as a result of the similarities between the two regions stemming from their shared history.

Furthermore, conducting research in Indore had a number of benefits. Firstly, the central location of Indore in India’s geography and the fact that Indore is well connected in India’s road and highway network meant that Indore is a convergence point for both north-south and east-west traffic in India. This suited our study as one of our objectives for this study was to understand regional variations in Indian truck art. Secondly, Indore has a large and developed truck building

and decorating industry with trucks coming from around the country to be painted here. This was critical as our primary objective was to study the art form. Lastly, Indore has a developed logistics industry with many truck owners and truck fleet owners based in the city. This was important as our sample required for us to interview a range of stakeholders from drivers and truck artists to truck and truck fleet owners. As a result, after careful considerations of these factors, we chose Indore for conducting the primary research for this study.

In Indore, we visited a number of locations, with each location serving a different purpose for our primary research. Two locations, Transport Nagar and the highway stretches of Tejaji Nagar were our primary areas for conducting field research as they have a large concentration of truck body and painting workshops. The truck body and painting industries here are very developed, with work first starting in the city over 20 years ago. The industry first developed in Transport Nagar, which is closer to the city center, and slowly spread to the outskirts of the city to Tejaji Nagar and nearby areas. Another location, Bicholi, had a large concentration of warehouses and godowns where the loading of goods on trucks used to take place. Our last location was Dewas Naka, which was selected as it had a large amount of truck driver and truck owner unions based out of the area. In each location, we established multiple contacts from workshops and warehouses to truck owners' offices, etc. for conducting interviews of respondents and the visual documentation of trucks. As an additional note, there was an abundance of truck drivers waiting with their trucks at each of these locations for various reasons: from drivers and trucks waiting for getting orders for hauls, to drivers waiting for goods to be loaded onto the trucks, to drivers waiting for their trucks to be built and painted at these workshops. This helped us in obtaining large and diverse samples for our study.

Research Statement and Research Questions

The importance of trucks and the role that they occupy in India is largely underrepresented: these carriers of goods, art, stories and people enable the movement of capital and hope through the vast expanses of this country, creating a significant impact on the economy of the nation and impacting the lives of every citizen of this country. They act as micro-canvases in the larger story of the country, with every truck embodying a different vision of this country. The art that lives on and within these trucks paints a living, breathing and moving picture of the lives, hopes and aspirations of the stakeholders of this industry, and in the process engages the consciousness of

the more than a billion citizens of the country. It acts as a unifier in the collective visions of “India”, creating and engaging memories and associations towards the country in the minds of all its citizens.

Keeping this in mind, the research statement and research questions for this study are as follows.

Research statement and questions: Studying drivers associations and syntax of truck art in India.

1. To identify a syntax for truck art in India.
2. Analyzing elements for their iconographic and semiotic relevance.
3. Exploring the relationship between stakeholders and the art/decorations.

Thus, this study aspires to analyze and understand truck art in India for the meanings portrayed by its various elements, signs and symbols; understand whether Indian truck art has an underlying syntax or language that dictates the placement of the elements of truck art on trucks and its impact on the overall meaning of the art on the truck, the meanings of these individual elements and their relationship with one another and; explore the relationship of truck art with the people who are the most intimate with it - the truck drivers who occupy these trucks as their living and working spaces.

Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative research study to understand the phenomenon of truck art in India with both primary and secondary sources for the purposes of data collection.

Primary Sources

For the collection of data from primary sources, fieldwork was conducted in the central Indian city of Indore, the capital of the state of Madhya Pradesh, from 8th February 2020 to 15th February 2020.

Samples and Methods of Data Collection. We have referred to two separate sample groups with two different strategies of data collection: (a) semi-structured in-depth interviews with a sample of truck owners and truck fleet owners, truck drivers, truck artists and fine artists with an understanding of truck art and other Indian art forms; (b) visual documentation involving the

taking of pictures of trucks from all around the country that were present on-field in a specific format (front, back, and sides) for each truck.

Sampling Strategies. For conducting semi-structured interviews, we have used simple random selection and snowballing methods of sampling as our primary sampling strategies. For visual documentation of trucks, our sampling strategy consisted of the documentation of a stratified sample of trucks representing variations in geography and regionality within the country. The variance in the sample accounted for (a) the region where the truck was built, painted and decorated; and (b) the state of registration of the truck.

Methods of Data Analysis. For analysing the data collected through interviews with respondents, we primarily used multiple methods of data analysis. They are (a) thematic content analysis; (b) narrative analysis; (c) photo content analysis, and (d) ethnographic observational research. For the visual documentation part of the study, we used thematic analysis as well as textual analysis to derive inner meanings of the elements of the art on the trucks in our sample. Various methodologies of semiotic analysis, used by scholars like Madan (2018), have also aided our analysis for the projects.

Secondary Sources

As part of the secondary research for this study, we have referred to a variety of sources. Information on truck art in both academic and non-academic circles is limited, especially in the Indian context due to a lack of research on the subject. Thus, in our literature review, we referred to information from not only academic articles and research studies but also news articles, documentaries on truck art (which were a crucial part of our preliminary research and finalization of our topic and research questions for this study), coffee table books, government data, and so on. A detailed overview of the secondary sources used for this study is conducted in Chapter 2 of this Report.

Ethical Overview of the Study

This study was an undergraduate research study conducted by fifteen students enrolled in the second year of the Undergraduate Program at FLAME University accompanied under the guidance of a faculty mentor, Dr. Dwarika Prasad Unniyal, Dean, Faculty of Business. The study was conducted as a part of FLAME University's Discover India Program which aims to facilitate

the exploration of India by undergraduate students through targeted research studies such as this one. The study was reviewed and cleared by FLAME University's Institutional Review Board for its ethical practices and its treatment of human research subjects and the protection of their rights. Furthermore, all fifteen members of this study passed the Harvard Non-Affiliate Protecting Human Research Participants (PHRP) Quiz and have received a certificate signifying the same.

Respondents were informed about the purposes of the study through a Participant Information Statement read by the members of this study before the start of any interview or the documentation of a truck and informed consent was obtained from all respondents for the collection of their data and responses or the documentation of the respondents' trucks for the purposes of this study. Special care taken to obtain verbal consent from owners and drivers of each truck in the visual documentation part of our study. Signatures of interview respondents of this study were recorded on Informed Consent sheets as part of the ethical requirements of this study. All the data collected from this study is stored securely (on both online and offline media) within FLAME University and its server and kept strictly confidential. Copies of the Participation Information Statement and unfilled Informed Consent sheets can be obtained by emailing kavish.sanghrajka@flame.edu.in and irb@flame.edu.in. If you have any questions regarding this study, its ethical practices and methodology, please address them to kavish.sanghrajka@flame.edu.in.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to Scholarship on Truck Art

Focus on truck art initially developed during the 1970s in Afghanistan (Elias, 2003, Madan, 2018). It resulted in the creation of multiple publications, including journals, coffee-table books, magazines, photo essays. Some examples are Blanc, J.C. (1976). *Afghan Trucks*. New York: Stonehill Publishing Co; Hallet. S (1973), “Afghanistan’s Hot Roads,”. New York: Ruveu Architecture Plus. 27-32. This is believed to be a direct result of the traditional presence of ethnographers and their rising interest in the country (Novakovic, 2018). However, Jamal Elias (2003) identified a serious dearth of analysis within works on the subject in that era.

One of the few and earliest known academic papers is a doctoral dissertation by Marie-Bénédicte Dutreux published in 1978, Paris (Madan, 2018). It attempted to systematically investigate the motifs used on trucks seen across Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the merits, the credibility of the text suffered due to mistaken translations from lacking knowledge of Pashto, Urdu, Persian (Elias, 2003). The limited scholarship on truck art underwent a relocation due to violence caused by the Soviet invasion and the civil war. Within a few years, a relatively safer Pakistan emerged as the centre of the industry and its study (Elias, 2003). Thereby providing a haven to constantly expanding research work that aided the analysis undertaken in this report.

Truck decoration is only a subset to the larger concept of vehicular decoration in South Asia. In the *Gods Of Roads*, Novakovic (2018) identifies multiple such programs for vehicles on the streets of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh. Canvases for this art include trucks, buses, minivans, share-taxis, animal carts, *tongas*, etc. In the early 1980s, anthropologists like Johanna Kirkpatrick wrote various articles about the rickshaw art in Bangladesh (Novakovic, 2018). Many more like these were instrumental in forming the outlines of an entire body of work on the topic. Although running along similar lines, knowledge productions about truck and general vehicular art parted ways at the point of formalisation (Elias, 2003). The systematic decoration on trucks and buses made them easier to analyse and trace. As a result, setting them apart on the road. This distinction significantly contributed towards making the segregation of existing literature more efficient.

Ashima Madan (2018) explained the concept of truck decoration as a logical follow-up to the practice of adorning carriages, vehicles, machines and tools in the region. She further identified

countries like the USA, Japan, Nigeria, Kenya, and the Philippines, as centres of significantly large industries devoted to truck building and decoration. Art in each of these regions is contextually and historically programmed. For e.g. the *dekotora* truck of Japan displays characteristics of samurais and transformers that form important parts of its history and popularculture respectively (Madan, 2018).

Contextual variation has also manifested in texts that try to trace the origins of truck art. Indian academia considers it to have begun from the Sikh practice of painting portraits of their Gurus (Madan, 2018). Whereas, Elias (2003) termed truck art as a struggle for representation that was born in the religious matrix of an Islamic Pakistan that opposed any sort of imagery. Readers shall encounter multiple such narratives across the chapter and other resources. In reviewing them, this project does not aim at forming one. It is a task that is here being left upon an entirely different study to undertake.

Conflicting theories have had limited impact on the attention that trucks attract on the streets. This resulted from the common social and political history of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Novakovic, 2018; Suman & Mirche, 2013). In the period between the World Wars, used trucks of the armed forces were sold in the civilian market (Suman & Mirche, 2013). They became the primary instruments for independent truckers looking to run transport businesses. After purchase, most trucks would be sent to workshops for revamping their structures according to their buyer's needs. The process would also include beautification and alterations in the external appearance. Unlike in the army, trucks now begged individuality just as their civilian owners did. In his film, Shantanu Suman (2013) identified truck art as an arena of contest amongst drivers on the road (Schmid, 2000). Popular phrases, figural images and accessories are used to meet this demand of distinctive pride. This led decorations and content into being active signifiers of the drivers and the owners' [often the same] beliefs (Schmid, 2000; Elias, 2003).

Independence and partition divided the contexts of a united India along religious and geographical lines. The social and economic systems chosen by the two dominions impacted the content and the type of trucks they were to harbour (Madan, 2018). Originating decades after the partition, scholarly enquiry of truck art viewed the two countries as separate playing-fields. While flourishing in Pakistan, scholarship remained relatively limited in India. The former also emerged

as a preferred destination for researchers from across the globe. A relatively new Bangladesh spent much of this time identifying its own trajectory.

Pakistani Scholarship

In 1995, Anna Schmid (2000) conducted one of the first focused studies on truck art after the Afghan setback. Displaying it through an exhibition in the same year, she later published her findings in ‘Truck Art as Arena of Contest (Novakovic, 2018). Most scholars before Schmid followed the method of analysing motifs after singling them out from trucks. She pointed out the unaccountability this approach displayed towards diversity and contexts. Truck art and decor were then believed to be holding personal, functional and cultural significance. Respectively explaining them as.

“The social relations between people involved in its production, Status accorded to truck-builders and drivers, their pride in expertise and personal innovation as well as knowledge”

(Schmid, 2000)

Schmid (2000) defined the state of these significances as a result of an ongoing contest between multiple actors. Her work chose to explain the cultural one by taking meaningful insights from the other two. It identified various stakeholders like truck drivers, painters, and the Pakistani audience, in order to do the same. The cultural importance of motifs and decorations was divided into ‘three most obvious realms’ of competition— Religious, Political and [popularly] Cultural. These identifications and bifurcations have formed the operational units for research in this sphere ever since. If not, they have been building blocks in any developments that have followed.

The truck building process is an optimal manifestation of the dynamic between the stakeholders. Keeping this in mind, she carefully examined multiple trucks in Pakistani right from their initialisation. Each of them was counted as a specimen that uniquely contributed to this evolution. For the longest time now, truck companies have limited themselves to producing chassis and engines. Decisions related to the structure and utility of the vehicle have been left to the owners and builders. This is largely responsible for the qualities of this industry. Contrary to popular belief,

truck painting is only a part of the larger art of truck decoration. Blacksmiths, body-makers, lacquerers, *hornwalas*, painters, and multiple other professionals are involved in creating the final product. Nevertheless, it was only the painters who referred to their work as an art form. Despite professionals stressing on equality amongst themselves, Schmid (2000) observed the higher position commanded by the body-makers. She attributed this to their job of providing the basic structure of the vehicle, the canvas for the art.

In addition to decorating the truck through variation in structure, empty spaces on the surface are filled with couplets, poems, philosophical aphorisms, etc (Schmid, 2000). Religious, political and cultural division of these led the author to her valued analysis. Ostentatious decoration and imagery have been considered out of place in Islam. Governments and clerics have been attempting to curb the practice of truck decoration since the inception of the state. However, the formidable opposition from the trucking community has kept them far away from doing the same. Drivers often cite this as the government's wish to take away their voices and mediums of expression. Schmid (2000) identified multiple motifs that represented the constant discourse between the trucking community and the clerics of Pakistan. In this process, truck decoration has gone as far as questioning the conventional methods of religious practice by the *Mullahs*. Portraits of *Malangs* or *Sufis* are often drawn on trucks, as a symbol of the same. This also renders the lives and conditions of the drivers analogous to that of these ascetics. Both of them are glorified for surviving outside the religious and social conventions of their surrounding (Schmid, 2000).

Truckers convey much of their opinions of the cultural and the political realm in a similar manner. The political sentiment of the masses in Pakistan could be easily identified from the back of the trucks. Paintings of F-16 jets in context to the Pressler amendment, stereotyped soldiers, former heads of states highlighted the extent of the arts update with time. This decoration also had an instrumental significance in protecting the drivers from local police by pledging their allegiance to ruling parties. Nonetheless, truck decoration has not always been about glorifying the authorities. Through them, drivers often communicate about political issues like corruption that they face in their daily lives. Administrative failure in maintaining the roads, controlling rising commodity prices also found mentions on the surface of trucks. The final kind of political messaging mentioned in this work tends towards motivating the community to wade through the harsh conditions that they experience (Schmid, 2000).

The cultural messages and imagery on trucks are equally significant to the drivers' existence in society. Paintings of local monuments, landmarks and idealised scenarios help them hold their identity and position amidst the rapidly changing surrounding. Their attempt to remain socially relevant is depicted through the various life lessons that are beautifully written. On a lighter note, drivers are continuously involved in making their trucks more likeable for the viewers and themselves. They do so by getting their favourite popular culture symbols and various identifiers drawn and added to the open spaces on the vehicle (Schmid, 2000).

The most valuable contribution by Schmid (2000) has been her approach in viewing truck art - not just as a means of free expression but also as that of free interpretation. Further highlighting that the said contests takes place through hints and allusions, and not explicit symbolisms with set meanings. Her following definition of truck art had deep impacts on the enquiries that were undertaken in the future.

"[Truck art is] An open ended process of signification in which consumers as producers of meanings are equally involved as the producers of the commodity."

(Schmid, 2000)

Works of various scholars in the coming years added to the wide base of the research established by Schmid (2000). They developed more profound categorisations and got rid of the objectification to a larger degree. Two texts of Pakistani scholar Jamal J Elias (2003, 2005) are counted in those mentioned above. Namely, 'On Wings of Diesel' and 'Truck decoration and religious identity' (Elias, 2003, 2005). As a part of the specialisation, Elias primarily focused on religious imagination as a factor in truck decoration. Presenting trucks as an important popular art and understanding the nature of responses to religious imagery was the two fold objective of the research conducted. He also focused on the various causes that turned truck building and decoration into a full fledged industry in Rawalpindi. Lacking visible economic benefits inspired a shift in exploration from instrumental to personal significance. Eventually, he proved the value of decorations not just for aesthetics, but as depictions of the religious, sentimental and emotional worldview of the employees in the truck industry (Elias, 2003).

The process of inspecting Truck art was relatively different as compared to previous instances. Elias formed programs of truck decorations along geographic, religious and cultural

lines. Five regional truck styles were identified for five different social contexts in Pakistan - Punjabi, Swati, Peshawar, Baluchi, Karachi. They varied in terms of images, pattern, symbols, also their overall structures and adornments. Their set characteristics made it relatively easy for him to incorporate a larger number of trucks in the study. Alongside providing it with greater ability to generalise, this ensured adequate contextualisation of all images and figures (Elias, 2003). Schmid's (2000) idea of free interpretation and expression was sufficiently incorporated in this method.

Jamal J Elias (2003) is also recognised for pioneering the syntactical and semiotic study of truck art and decoration, forming an essential part of the research presented through this report. He conducted a detailed analysis of two sub-styles of trucks (Gilgit and Quetta) in the latter half of 'On Wings of Diesel'. For the first time, the location of the various adornments was given an equal share in determining their meaning. A spatial analysis of the trucks helped realise the position of various types of decorations on its body. Art followed a pattern of reducing seriousness from the front to the back of a truck. Religious content would receive the prime spots in the vehicle that included the front, especially the top of the windshield. Moving backward, the sides of the truck were seen carrying imagery that was involved in forming the social and geographical identity of the driver. For e.g., famous landmarks from one's native place, idealised sceneries from foreign lands and dream houses. The rear of the truck would be full of various cultural and political denominations, making it, typically, the least of the priorities of a driver. This space would be filled with images of political leaders, famous singers, actors, famous funny couplets, dialogues and song lyrics. However, the major focus of this work remained on the front i.e. the religious aspects of these trucks (Elias, 2003).

Six categories of motifs were endorsed to further facilitate the analysis of various truck decoration programs. This demanded a departure from the sign-based analyses, and treated all material as a pattern on the body of the truck. It maintained differences only in the geometric and the ornamental elements on the trucks. Those categories were as follows: a) Explicit religious symbols and images, b) Talismanic and fetish objects, c) Talismanically and religiously loaded symbols, d) Idealised elements of life, e) Elements of modern life, f) The non-religious calligraphic programs (Elias, 2003).

The second work, 'Truck decoration and religious identity', was committed to identifying religious programs in the trucks of Pakistan. Although, it made few attempts to relate them to the

previously identified geographic programs. Four trucks were selected for the analysis. Three of them represented the conventional Islamic sects of Shi'a, Sunni and vernacular Sunni. The fourth truck belonged to a rising offshoot of Islam called Tablighi Jama'at. While analysing, the author identified a similar syntax to these decorations (Elias, 2005).

Consequently, all religious symbols were placed on the front. Their location added to their sanctity. Formal texts that are held in high regard were written on the lower part of the front. The panel at the back, till the dusters, was reserved for informal signifiers. It contains popular media or content that the drivers/owners personally prefer. The lower part of the back display's writings include humorous verses, pithy sayings and popular moral and ethical exhortations. The sides of the truck were responsible for placing it in a 'geographical context'. It portrayed cities, famous buildings, terrain from the truck's place of origin etc. The names of the truck, transport service and the artists were usually found in this section. The huge space was also used to show the personal preferences of the drivers/owners. It is important to note that symbols in this area, despite occasionally being of a religious nature, did not carry religious sentiments (Elias, 2005).

This syntax had been visible across the three mainstream sects of Islam. Their content effectively displayed the religious background of their owner/drivers. While Sunnis focused more on Allah, Shias mentioned various other saints and messengers. A vernacular sect of Sunni Islam seems to invoke blessings of Allah alongside a few Sufi saints. As one of the categories, vehicles also carried many Talismanic and apotropaic symbols to invoke 'good fortune' (Elias, 2005).

The discourse involved in truck decoration was visible to those of the Tablighi Jama'at that abided to this format to a lesser extent. They portrayed their beliefs in a similar manner on the front and the back. However, used the sides as a method of propagating their religious beliefs. Principles of the Jama'at or religious ideas were the content of these side panels. Unlike others, they were all in complete religious significance. This deviation was predicted to be the Jama'at's way of using trucks as what the author called 'Missionary Trucks'. Compared to other means of transport, their greater exposure made them suitable for the task. The changing decoration pattern implied a departure from traditional sects of religion. The social discourse signified through this added to the status of truck decoration as a social force and a method of personal representation for the trucking community (Elias, 2005).

Various other researchers from Pakistan contributed to building knowledge about truck art. They have been seen exchanging ideas and rubrics with the works of scholars mentioned above.

A paper published from the University of Punjab, written by Samina Sheik (2018), discusses the social impact of trucks in the contemporary era. The text attempts to understand the significance of the various embellishments that complement the paintings on the trucks. An ever-widening scope of innovation in these items can be considered to be the paper's main conclusion. It also explores and discusses the upcoming markets for these products and the overall impact of globalisation on truck art (Sheikh, 2018). The author can be credited with introducing items like radium stickers and hanging to academia on the subject.

Sheikh (2018) also started the widespread debate about ascertaining the position of truck art in the larger context of modern art. Acknowledged as 'low', she mentions that it caters to the general population and acts as a strong source of communication. She firmly stood for providing it with a higher status (Sheikh, 2018). Instead, it is essential to examine the views of other authors about this debate. In a relatively predated work, Schmid (2000) faintly touches upon the grave consequences of attempting to merge this art into the mainstream. Those include a loss of essence and commercialisation, eventually leading to the silencing of the trucker community's voice. Such concepts have been important in shaping our outlooks towards the art and members involved in producing it.

By and large, the Pakistani academia and truck art has inspired multiple studies in other social and geographical contexts. An overall view of literature on Pakistani trucks suggests there to be a strong influence of religion on the same. The country's creation on a religious basis seems to be clearly reflected in the texts produced.

Indian Scholarship and its Gaps

The attention received by the Indian truck art has varied from that of its counterparts. Treated as an element of popular culture, it has garnered focus from various news papers, bloggers and other media. Observations related to various aspects of truck decoration are also relatively different from that in Pakistan. An article by CNN talked about the symbolism on the trucks like bangles to remind driver's of their wives; ornaments to remind them of children & family; demons and shoes tied on the bottom, in front of the truck to shoo away bad omen. It also mentioned the future of this industry in India. This suggests that increasing technology and mass producers have seemingly made it hard for truck artists to sustain themselves along with their art (McKenzie, 2015).

In popular media, a filmmaker named Shantanu Suman (2013) has visually documented the process of truck building in cities of New Delhi and Indore. Sentiments of the various stakeholders attached to the art and decoration has been covered in the same. While being great information sources on truck art in India, these media do not deliver profound knowledge of the subject. Formal and systematic study of truck decoration has been limited to a few known scholars. One is a semiotic analysis of Indian truck art, undertaken by Aashima Madan (2018).

In 2018, a research paper submitted to the University of Dublin by Madan (2018) aimed at understanding the semiotics of digitised truck art in commercial use. Its secondary objective was to understand the negotiation that the meanings of visual elements undergo. The text discussed and highlighted the loci of truck decoration and transportation in India. Various norms and legislations form a part of the system that governs trucks in the country. Multiple instances in history have witnessed the administration make certain signs and symbols compulsory. Unlike Pakistani academia, the author goes on to elaborate on the system's intervention in the decoration of trucks. In her opinion, acts like the Central Motors Vehicle Act, 1989, and authorities like the Regional Transport Office (RTO) have an essential role to play (Madan, 2018). The reduced opulence of trucks in India, as a result of these factors, also happens to be the primary difference between them and those from Pakistan. In place of keeping the scope open, the work has selected a few common symbols for a singular analysis- namely, national flags, cow and calf, birds, devils/charms and calligraphic texts. Extensive research was conducted on the historical backgrounds of each symbol used (Madan, 2018). However, this did not create knowledge about the social and cultural context of truck art in India. Actively highlighting a niche that could be targeted by the research presented in this report.

Notwithstanding the limited nature of the work, the theoretical framework employed by Madan (2018) is noteworthy for our research. Like Jamal Elias (2003), her methodology of analyses was borrowed from the semiotic frameworks of Charles Sanders Peirce (1998) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1974). Terminologies proposed by Peirce, Saussure and their successors were widely used by Madan in analysing truck art. Furthermore, she used images of decorations to document and analyse certain *signs*, *paradigms*, and *syntagms*. Despite being done with a different objective and methodology, the use of this framework has been an important contribution to the study of truck decoration around the world. While the framework employed by Madan

(2018) differs starkly from the framework that we have used in this study, it is noteworthy in its accuracy and was significant in the design of this study.

Existing literature on truck art around the world has highlighted a significant dearth of knowledge about the Indian context. The social and cultural contexts of truck art have not yet been enquired about in a scholarly fashion. Studies related to vehicular art in general have only called for more specialised study of trucks (Novakovic, 2018). Credible methodologies tested in countries like Pakistan appear to possess the potential of successful application in India. Multiple answered and unanswered questions from around the world can be employed to generate knowledge about Indian truck art. A combination of the factors, as mentioned above, pose a great opportunity of research. Although focused on India, the project can also set a base for future projects looking towards gaining an overall picture of Truck art in Asia or comparing that of India and Pakistan.

Syntax and semiotics of Indian Truck Art

Functionality is intrinsic to the idea of decoration, with decoration being inherently part of human psychology. Its existence needs no specific functionality. Starting as a bare canvas, subsequent processes of building and painting, influenced by multiple factors, contribute to the creation of the Indian truck. Being as essential as it is, its decoration incorporates a wide variety of themes, patterns, and objects. They come together to form an arrangement of a unique identity.

Many facets of existence define this identity. The combination of chosen and conventionally driven symbols and designs are the core of the arrangements that make this marker of identity. Not surprisingly, its complexity is layered with the additional understanding that the significance of the final result cannot be predicted by the artist or the “primary audience”- the truck driver. They become an artistic norm in nations following a similar practice.

This form of decoration is common in many countries; hence region-based differences become a hallmark in this regard. The intensity with which it is practiced ranges from spare to extremely elaborate, as observed in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan. Asian countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines and certain South American countries practice it too (Elias, 2003). Pakistan sees heavy ornamentation of almost all road-based public transport. It is rare to see a vehicle employed by the public to be bare, lacking all sorts of motifs, colour, patterning, additional structuring, decorative hangings, accessories, and so on.

Pakistani trucks, as studied by Elias (2003), show strong aesthetic, religious, emotive ideas and ideals of the previously described main actors of the truck industry. Elias maintains that the five main regions of the state heavily influence its design, the specific motifs, and the conventions behind them. From Karachi to Peshawar, the models of the trucks themselves could differ, along with the motifs chosen, the kind of craftwork added (be it wood carving, metal cowling, etc.) and the very purpose of its existence. Regionality is the driving factor behind the essence of a truck.

In the Indian context, its diverse and sprawling range of states and communities are the primary influence behind the wide variety of truck decoration that is observed on Indian roads. Depending on where it is built, it showcases the rich culture, heritage, and convention appropriated by the icons, symbols, and objects portrayed on the truck. Punjab is known for its elaborate truck paintings, while Rajasthani trucks can be identified by their excessive tasselling and decorative hangings. In fact, India has a slight divide between the northern and southern truck, not counting the many preferential exceptions. While the typical southern truck sees little to no decoration, a

bare interior, and a minimally designed exterior, the average northern truck will be adorned with much embellishment and ornamentation, marked by colourful designs and various symbols.

Indore is a city where the truck industry thrives. Connected by numerous national and state highways, its highways are lined with transport company offices and truck building workshops. This makes Indore heavily connected to other states around the country as well as a direct starting point of construction. Being situated in the central section, it sees trucks from all regions and parts of the country. The ability to observe various regional trucks as well as to see the truck building, painting, and decorating process from scratch was likely in this city. It is here that several trucks were observed at different stages; some had stopped mid-journey, some starting their journey, others ending, and many in the process of being built from the ground up.

Categorisation of Motifs; The “What”

Indian trucks and truck decorations are a sight that can be observed across the nation. They come in a wide variety of styles that differ along the lines of region, religion, community, purpose, convention, and so on. When looking at the truck’s ornamentation specifically, the motifs applied can be categorised in diverse and possibly overlapping categories when observing their significance.

Jamal Elias proposed a system that broadly divided them into six groups. He separated the motifs according to figure (object or symbol) and calligraphy and chose to work focussing on sign-based imagery. Regarding the visual images as unlike a linguistic system, he attempts to analyse the observable ornamental decoration (Elias, 2003).

Using this system, we attempt to understand and analyze Truck Art in the Indian context:

Overt Religious Symbols and Imagery

This category includes the majority of symbols that showcase the identity of the driver, owner, or religious association of the company of the truck. These could include the Swastika, the Om symbol, the Khanda (the symbol signifying Sikhism), the Islamic Crescent Moon and Star, the three symbols of Venkateshwara (Namam, Shanka, Chakra), the Jain Hand and Wheel of Ahimsa, and so on. Some symbols can have more than one meaning- they could signify a religion as well as a caste. Images of innumerable gods of various faiths can be observed, commonly of the

Hindu faith that believes in idol worship. Images of Krishna playing his flute, Ganesh, Shiva, Hanuman, various Sikh saints, the goddess Lakshmi, and more are just a few of the customarily identifiable deities.

Islamic imagery is restricted according to the basic understanding of their religion, which indicates that their religious symbols must never be disrespected in any way. Imraz, a truck driver from Jammu, explained how the truck getting damaged, the symbols weathering naturally, and people touching it would be possible forms of denigration (Imraz, personal communication, February 14, 2020). To prevent such possible damage, these critical symbols are situated in zones that are out of reach of the ordinary citizen.

Talismanic and Fetish Objects

These happen to be items that are significant usually to the driver or owner, outside the boundaries of religion. They instead symbolise good luck, protection, and the deterrence of evil. It carries “good energy” for both the driver as well as the truck itself. These may include the hanging of lemons, typically accompanied by green chillies, the tying of a black thread at the front of the truck, and the hanging of shoes. Some of these objects may entail a ritual that may be religious. These three are mainly believed to protect and bring good luck. The most common figure used by people for protection specifically from evil is the demon’s face that they may choose to have as a two-dimensional image or a plaque that could hang from the lower part of the truck.

Indian roads are notorious for the danger they pose to drivers, which further increases the people’s faith and belief in these objects. Other objects of personal significance, particularly of the drivers’ can also be included in this category. This could include the hanging of chains that may belong to a loved one, the placing of their significant other's bangles on it, and so on. Some choose to tie strips of cloth belonging particularly to their wives on their side mirrors and the lower parts of the truck.

Talismanic or Religious Symbols

Here, it is no more the object that is believed to contain the spirit or power, but the figure and the representation it holds. They make up the majority of the external motifs. Painted on with a brush, spray-painted or stuck onto the surface usually as a radium sticker, they can be done during its construction or added on to the truck later. They consist typically of objects, animals and flowers

that allude differently to that of its direct interpretation. Fish, a pot marked by a swastika containing betel leaves and a coconut (a traditionally Hindu ritualistic symbol), a Hawk, a Cow often accompanied by a Calf or a Lingam (a symbol of the Hindu God, Shiva), Lotuses, Eyes, Peacocks, and the like are some of the conventional symbols observed.



Figure 2. A photo of the Devil hanging from the back of a truck

Fish symbolize good fortune, while hawks are the symbol of Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji, a prominent Sikh saint. Cows are a symbol sacred to Hinduism and are worshipped and interpreted differently by many communities across India. When accompanied by a Lingam, it signified the Hindu God of Destruction- Shiva. Nandi, Shiva's mount happens to be a cow, and the Lingam is the most familiar symbol and representation of Shiva. Eyes have been seen to bring a sense of femininity to the truck. They also work to protect the truck from "Buri Nazar" or the evil eye. The Lotuses, Tigers, and Peacocks share the similar motive of nationality and national pride as symbols of the Indian state. (Elias, 2003).



Figure 3. A portrait of the Sikh symbol of Hawk on the side of a truck ; A portrait of a cow, feeding milk to her calf painted beautifully on the side of a truck.

Idealised Elements of Life

This category includes beautified elements that are not typically found in the lives of the owners or drivers. They include images of animals, birds, nature-based scenery, women, and venerated depictions of village life. The landscape scenes are mostly painted at the back of the truck. Other imagery can be found on the other parts of the truck too. Printed, photoshopped images are used by drivers inside the Cabin too. They can also depict geographical and historically significant sites such as the Taj Mahal.

Elements of Modern Life

These are figures that depict current life. They can be politically motivated, pictures of popular culture or even simple images or stickers of current objects. They paint the picture of the country's modern identity. Political statements are rarely made. They instead take the form of flags, symbols and people. The Indian flag and its colour theme are adapted in different ways to decorate the truck exterior. Many Punjabi trucks showcase the Maple leaf symbol of Canada as a decal sticker, along with the Canadian flag adorning different parts like the front bumper, side mirror and so on. New Zealand, the United States of America and the United Kingdom are examples of other countries whose flags are commonly utilised.

A common sticker used is the figure of Bhagat Singh, an independence era martyr idolised by many. Common objects like airplanes and footballs can also be seen. The region's popular

culture is reflected in paintings and stickers around the truck. Popular Bollywood actresses grace many posters stuck near the headlights, in the Cabin and some print outs also act as tyre mud flaps. Giant paintings of singers, poets, and even saints can be noticed at the back end of the truck.

Non-religious Calligraphy

When observing many trucks, they seem to have lettering that goes beyond religious phrasing. This category deals with romantic lines, poetry excerpts and witty one-liners. “Buri Nazar Waale, Tera Muh Kala” is a line that is popular on north Indian trucks, and it calls to ward off jealousy and people wishing evil upon them. “Hum Intezar Kareng” directly translated in English as “we will wait” is often accompanied by the image of a woman. It refers to the wives or lovers that wait for the drivers to return home while away on their long journeys on road. Political phrasing is also common. Bhagat Singh’s image is regularly complemented by the phrase “Jai Jawan, Jai Kisaan”, and the campaign phrase “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao” is a compulsory addition to the truck in many states.

“We 2 Ours 2” reinforces the "two children per family" policy initiated by Indian government. Patriotic images and themes are complemented by the phrases “India is Great”, “Mera Bharat Mahan”, “I love India” and “Jai Ho”. All these phrases can experience some form of variation and distortion according to region and community. Family members' names are commonly observed on the front and back of the truck. They are usually the owner’s or driver's children’s names. Some choose to add their wives’ names or even go as far as to name their truck. This division also includes all essential information, legalities and basic practical writing. The transport company’s name, truck details, driver and owner details, typical route details, “ALL INDIA PERMIT”, “goods carrier”, and more. Some truck workshops and painters add their details on their “canvas”, the truck exterior, as a form of advertising. Their names, address, and contact details are added soon after the completion of the work.



Figure 4. A photo of the side of the truck adorned with Non-religious decorations. ; A photo of the back of a truck highlighting Maharana Pratap in beautiful Calligraphy.



Figure 5. A photo of the back of a truck in Indore decorated with colourful Motifs.

The Placement of Motifs; The “Where”

These different motifs occupy various places on the truck. As this art can be interpreted as a social indicator and an expression of identity, the motifs take up certain places and positions on the truck. This can depend on their inherent purpose and other consequential factors. With some exceptions, their positions, as well as intentions behind it, can be generalised. When observing a truck from a decorative standpoint, it has three different sides- the front, back, and the two larger sides (Elias, 2005).

The sides of the truck seem to be the most unadorned amongst the rest. Though it has the largest space available for embellishment and beautification, it is often the most ignored. This is the side that is usually the one that is seen by a larger number of people but only for a fleeting minute. It situates the truck within the societal context. Making the most of this occurrence, it is

used primarily as an area of advertisement. The figure that occupies the largest amount of space is the name of the transport company, in big, bold writing. This may also be the space used by the truck/body workshop and painter to publicise their details, along with their moving body of work. “We 2 Ours 2” and “Bachao aur Padhao” are frequently added here.

It also contains all essential standard information such as truck details, owner/driver details, loading capacity, regions it usually travels through, the RTO requirements of “All India Permit” and the Indian flag and so on. The truck uses this space to sell itself. If other motifs are used, they are traditionally more historical or geographical (landscape oriented) in nature and are smaller in size. Occasionally, some less-detailed religious and talismanic figures are added to this side; the Cow, Hawk and Peacock are the most frequently observed motifs. Sometimes, they can be altered to include interesting ways to display the truck data using these motifs. Punjabi trucks often use the Khanda to display their information while utilising the Hawk to create the transportation company’s name. The upper slats are usually painted in bright colours and geometric shapes to add an aesthetic value. Sometimes, drape and curtain designs will be added to top the company name.

Looking at the truck, the only area that holds the larger paintings is on the upper half of the back end. This includes the top 5 to 6 wooden slats (typically) that are usually installed to accommodate taller loads. These larger paintings are normally portraits or panoramic in nature, painted on by the artist. These images can be religiously significant, often using portraits of religious people or even images of religiously loaded structures or places. This practice was believed to have gained popularity, starting in Punjab, with paintings made of Sikh saints. Landscapes and romanticised village life occasionally featuring women situated in these backdrops are some common imagery seen. Popular figures of society, be it mainstream pop culture or even political or historical are a common sight, with movie stars and singers usually being the most prevalent.

Almost all trucks have a lower back door or half-latch to keep the load in. This region is usually the side that keeps the observer’s eye and attention on the road, where the observer is the individual usually stuck behind the truck. Hence, this side is where most of the calligraphic motifs are. They can be phrasal instructions to the person behind them- “Wide Load”, “Please Sound Horn”, “Keep Distance”, “Use Dipper at Night”, etc. are some examples. The lower part, near the bumper, is where the witty, humorous lines can be located, along with popular moralistic writing

or lines invoking religious blessings. These specifications utilise the idea that the observer will be an individual on the road behind them. Therefore, the motifs and phrasing tend to be instructional or are meant to create impact when observed for a relatively longer period of time. Common lines like “Buri Nazar Wale, Tera Muh Kala” (cast your evil eye on me and your face will turn black), “Rehmat Teri Mehnat Meri” (the blessings of God, and my hard-work), “Samay Sona Hai, Ise Barbaad Na Kare” (time is precious so don’t waste it) are written typically in Hindi.

Every region has its own language, popular lines used and specific versions. Declarations regarding place and hometowns are also conventionally made. Nestled amongst the wording, some talismanic motifs such as peacocks and lotuses are commonplace. Being the end that faces the most human activity, it sees the most wear and tear. The workers tend to climb onto the vehicle with their feet, which is believed to be inappropriate when done on religious symbols. Hence, it stands to be the least religiously significant part.

In contrast to this, the front of the truck is the most “semiotically charged”, as Elias describes it (2005). It becomes the literal face and identity of the vehicle, the driver, and the owner. It is the side that is viewed best only when the truck is at a standstill. Today’s trucks showcase a wide variety of radium stickers on their front. This practice of radium embellishment arises from legislative laws, along with the common understanding that reflective fronts will make the truck more visible at night, thereby potentially preventing accidents. They also embellish the front grills, exaggerating them for the purpose of beautification.



Figure 6. A photo of the back of a truck decorated with Peacocks.

The bottom half of the front side has less religiously charged symbols. This is due to the people-intensive work that occurs here. Workers climb up the front to clean the top portion of the truck, including the windshield. This part has varying levels of phrasing, stickers of random objects, animals, nature-based images, floral patterns, stickers depicting popular culture with Bollywood actresses, and more. Some animated, contemporary pictures of Gods can also be found. Lines of poetry and romance are written here. Line art is commonly done in southern parts of the country, where thin lines of radium are used to create motifs. The truck manufacturers logo can be modified in different ways; adding two spokes on the side to create the illusion of a mustache is one kind of modification seen. The front bumper is home to many phrases such as “Road King”, “Speed King”, etc. Talismanic objects for luck and protection are often placed here. The common Nimbu-Mirchi hanging is tied to the front grill or suspended from the truck manufacturers' logo. Shoes are also hung from the bottom panelling.

The top half of the front is characterised by an overwhelmingly large number of religious symbols, along with other motifs. The swastika, Om and others, along with images of gods are frequently seen. Occasionally, a band of religious symbols in radium can be seen along the truck's contours. Trucks from Andhra Pradesh frequently use radium-based line art to create religious symbols depicting Lord Venkateshwara. This is also the place where the names of loved ones are mostly placed. The names also establish the ownership of the truck. The topmost panel or “crown” of the truck has phrasing like “Goods Carrier” and “All India Permit”. The middle part of the crown usually has an image of a deity, usually of the Hindu God Shiva, Hanuman or even Guru Nanak. All this makes the front the dearest and most respected part of the truck to the owner and driver. The windows can have some patterned or floral stickers, the names of family members of the driver/owner, or the name of the transport company. Some drivers choose to hang tassels, strips of cloth or black thread hangings called *chottis*, or accessorize the trucks in any which way they choose.

Truck drivers spend long periods of time on the road, stopping only for necessary breaks like meals. The place they spend maximum time in, apart from home or sometimes even more than at home, is in the Cabin of the truck. It becomes their second home, and the driver is the main decorator of the space. It becomes his real and unbridled space of expression, containing elements of their personal life. The basic wood panelling, metalwork, and design inside the truck is

completed along with the rest of the truck at the workshop. Even the doors are well decorated inside. The Cabin tends to be vibrantly coloured up north, with laminated wood panels of coloured patterning covering the walls. Southern trucks require less insulation and hence maintain steel walls with minimum colour inside.



Figure 7. A photo of the cabin of a truck in Indore.

Based on the needs and comfort level of the driver, things like lighting, fans, inbuilt air conditioning, a mattress, vessels, extra storage compartments, speakers and even first aid kits may be found inside. Personal belongings such as stickers and photos of loved ones can be commonly seen here. Bangles of many drivers' wives are hung on a rod attached to the framework of the truck, often kept in remembrance, or for love and luck. Many trucks have the back panel of the Cabin painted or more often adorned with blown-up pictures that are printed out. They feature images of women alongside some writing, romanticised village life, historical monuments and even popular culture actresses. It gives them something to look at, within the truck. The Cabin ends up being the religious centre point of the truck. Some are not comfortable displaying and broadcasting their religious sentiments on the external half of the truck, while others may not even be allowed to do so. Some explained that when vehicles are burned, the symbols on its exterior that spell out a certain religion or belief could be a major influence on the people committing this act.



Figure 8. A photo of bangles hanging ; A portrait of a design on the inner ceiling of a cabin of a truck.

This is why the little *mandir* or temple is kept in the center of the Cabin, between the two windshields. It could contain idols, but because of constant movement, images and stickers of deities are mostly used. This practice is usually specific to the followers of the Hindu religion and others such as Christianity and Sikhism. It isn't observed as much among people who practice faiths that do not have idol worship. Plastic flower and beaded garlands decorate the *mandir*. Some may choose to add tasselling to different parts inside. Plastic hangings, like mini chandeliers, are also used to embellish its interiors. All of this occurs based on the preference, comfort and monetary condition of the driver.

Relationships of Stakeholders and the Symbolism (the “Why”) in Truck Art

India’s truck art would not nearly be as prevalent today were it not dually functional and meaningful to the people who sanction, paint and interact with the art every day. This functionality and meaning exists simultaneously on many levels within the same paradigm of Indian truck art. Thus, in analysing the truck art of India, one needs to understand (a) its associations and relationships with the stakeholders of the art, and; (b) the impact these relationships have on the meaning of truck art. The objective of this study was to understand both of these phenomena, and through the course of this study our findings showcase the intrinsic nature of the symbolism in truck art and its relationship with the associations and relationships of its various stakeholders to the art. In this chapter we present our findings pertaining to both the stakeholders’ associations and relationships with truck art and the symbolism in truck art.

The nature of truck art in India serves as a reminder of its innate and pervasive role in the lives of its stakeholders. These stakeholders have a deep relationship with the art as its existence and continuity stems directly from the stakeholders’ relationships with the art. Truck art plays an important role in the lives of these stakeholders not only because it provides them a source of income and employment but also because the art is an expression of these stakeholders’ ideas, beliefs, thoughts, and realities. The art on a truck cannot be analysed without contextualizing the fact that it represents the expression of these stakeholders’ ideas; and the meaning and symbolism that lies within the art and its elements - the symbols, motifs and phrases that constitute the art - is lost if the art and its elements are used or analyzed without this context. This is mentioned briefly by Madan (2018) in her study of the artform. However, she contextualizes this to the use of truck art and its aesthetic-style in digital renditions of the art.

In her study, Madan (2018) refers to Peirce’s framework for understanding the semiotics of signs, symbols and icons and attempts to use it to analyse truck art in India. In her analysis of truck art in India, she highlighted the fact that truck art and its elements cannot be bucketed into categories of icon, index and symbol and how the final meaning of the art depends on the ideologies and interpretation of the interpreter. While her study is salient in many ways, the design, objectives and findings of this study are of a completely different nature.

In this study of truck art, we have placed significance on the stakeholders and the meaning and symbolism within truck art that stems from their ideas and thoughts. In using Peirce’s

framework as an example, we have placed paramount importance solely on the ideas that the signifier (in this case, the stakeholders of the art) want to convey and their impact on the final meaning of truck art. Coming back to Madan's (2018) study, in her semiotic analysis of truck art in India, she presents the fact that the meaning of truck art is lost to an interpreter who attempts to view the art either on a medium that is not the truck itself; or an interpreter who does not fully understand and grasp the nature of the trucking industry, the lives of the stakeholders and their impact on the artform. This is a fundamentally different method of understanding truck art, its stakeholders and its semiotic relevance and symbolism as the design and findings of this study place higher significance on the communicator or signifier rather than the interpreter.

Further, in our analysis, we haven't used Peirce's, Saussure's or any other theoretical framework present in the field of visual semiotics as a result of the unique nature of truck art, its significance to its stakeholders, and their role in shaping not only the art itself but also the messages that lie within the art. The findings of this study attempt to portray not only the art and its inner semiotics but also attempt to shed light on the lives, realities, struggles, ideas and thought processes of its stakeholders. Thus, the framework of analysis of this study is by design unique to best contextualize the findings of this study to the unique nature of Indian truck art.

What is interesting in the case of Indian truck art is the fact that the canvas for the art - the truck - isn't limitless, and truck artists regularly must both limit and conform their art to the space available on the vehicles. Thus in the Indian context, the prevalence of truck art isn't driven merely by the aesthetic beauty of the art, but also by functionality and the underlying meaning that the art; its elements, motifs and symbols convey. What this signifies is that this symbolism that not only drives truck art but also defines it stems from and correlates directly to the associations and relationships of the stakeholders with the art. The elements that are most commonly associated with truck art such as the bright colour schemes, picturesque landscapes of villages, rivers and mountains, phrases such as "Horn Please", and so on cannot be viewed out of context: their meaning and symbolism arises from the fact that they have been placed on trucks. Thus, the strong, intrinsic correlations between the symbolism and meaning of truck art and the associations and relationships of its stakeholders to the art are some of the most important findings of this study.

It must be noted that the associations of the stakeholders are not the sole driver of the symbolism and meaning present within Indian truck art. Through this study, we have identified multiple other facets behind the symbolism behind truck art. While the 'associations and

intentions' of the stakeholders are found to be the primary driver of symbolism and semiotic meaning behind truck art, factors such as the geography and styles, legislation and syntax/placement of symbols are also crucial in determining the symbolism within truck art. Combined, these facets represent the ideas and thought processes of the truck owners and drivers, the artistic choices of the truck artist and various other factors such as culture, legislation and regulatory norms, religion, geography, language and so on that shape truck art into the phenomenon that it is today.

The associations of stakeholders signify their relationship with the art and its elements and their intentions signify why a specific symbol, motif or phrase was painted or written onto the truck, and what it represents to the one or various stakeholders in the truck's art. The geography and styles of painting (or writing) of truck art represent the geographical variance in Indian truck art. Legislation highlights the role that regulatory practices have on shaping, organizing, and signifying the different elements of truck art. Lastly, The syntax/placement of the symbols represents a general trend in the placement of symbols, motifs, and phrases on a truck's body, the reasons of their placement and its effect on their meaning and functionality. It is critical to mention that these are not the only factors that impact the symbolism in truck art in India. There are a multitude of other micro-factors that affect the building and decoration of individual trucks, and these are contextual to every truck's building and decoration process. In explaining the identified factors, we do not attempt to signify all of the symbolism in Indian truck art. The factors mentioned in this section are merely the most significant and universal factors that have been observed in this study.

Associations of Stakeholders with Truck Art and their Intentions.

The associations and relationships of stakeholders with the art refer to the stakeholders' interactions with the art. As mentioned, they are key to understanding not only the relevance of the art but also its inner symbolism. The intention or reason refers directly to the intentional act of why a specific symbol, phrase, or motif is painted or written on a truck's body by the artist and the ideas that a stakeholder, whether it be the truck owner, artist or driver, means to convey through it. Thus, this method of understanding the symbolism within these aspects of a truck's decoration is, in essence, a deterministic process wherein the meanings of the elements of a truck's decoration are derived from the ideas that a stakeholder, be it the truck driver, artist or owner, wants to express

or portray. The art becomes a portrait of the stakeholder whose will necessitates that specific symbol, motif or phrase's inclusion in the overall design of the truck.

The variety of elements that comprise truck art makes it a complicated process to understand the relationships of the stakeholders to the elements and the intention or meaning behind them. Further, the diversity in the relationships of the stakeholders with the art makes this challenged. On one level, this process is made easier by categorizing these elements. However, the individuality of the reasoning and thought by each stakeholder must also be recognized. Every truck driver, owner and artist has their interpretation of the inclusion and meaning behind a symbol or motif on a truck, tied closely to their personal views on the subject matter.

Like most art forms, truck art is also inherently dynamic, possessive and subjective: each brush stroke on a truck represents varying ideas of stakeholders on a variety of subjects from poverty and hardship, religion, politics, geography and so on. Speculating and universally generalizing the meaning behind commonly used symbols and motifs is a self-defeating practice due to the sheer diversity that is present within the artform itself. However, an attempt must be made while keeping in mind the risks of over-generalizing. There are certain common threads in terms of the symbolism of the art that do run more or less in the minds of most stakeholders of truck art. In this section, we attempt to describe these common threads, visions and ideas that we have observed in our study. While we highlight these common threads, we must pause and emphasize the inherent subjectivity of such an art and the need for more studies on India's truck art to gain a deeper and more encapsulating understanding of the art.

As the stakeholders are employed as the primary units of analysis to understand the symbolism and meaning behind truck art, it is important to understand their individual roles and the distinctions between their interactions and relationships with the art. Overall, there exists a hierarchy in the accommodation of ideas of stakeholders on a truck. The truck owner's ideas and authority being the most important in determining a truck's final design and decoration. Since they own the canvas (the truck) and are also financing the design and decoration of a truck, their preferences are regarded as the most important by truck artists. Truck drivers usually have the least contribution in the final design of a truck's art and decoration. Most drivers are limited to having a role only in the design of the cabins, which some owners, like Luv Agarwal, allow as a marker of respect to the drivers as the cabins constitute the drivers' personal spaces where they spend countless hours living and working (L. Agrawal, personal communication, February 14, 2020).

The role of a truck driver in a truck's design and decoration is dependent on a couple of factors. First, it is important to understand whether a truck driver is also the owner of a specific truck. Second, if the driver is employed by a truck owner, then the relationship between the driver and the owner signifies the driver's role and say in the truck's design and decoration. If a driver is relatively new and hasn't worked with an owner for a long time, they may not be consulted at all and the conversation about the design of the truck may be limited to the truck owner, the truck artist and the truck body shop owner. Finally, truck artists function as interpreters, translators and illustrators in ensuring that the ideas of the drivers and owners are adequately represented in the final design while also representing the nuances of truck art and their expertise and knowledge of the art.

Truck Drivers

Truck drivers lead difficult lives with daily struggles and challenges arising from their arduous occupation. Truck driving is a dangerous occupation owing to India's poor roads, and long hours and nonstop driving mean that the work is mentally and physically draining. The nature of the work combined with strict schedules and timelines leads to a degradation of drivers' health and a compounding of physical and mental health issues for a majority of drivers (Press Trust of India, 2018). Drivers also are inconvenienced by regular and many-a-times unnecessary checking by the corrupt Regional Transport Office (RTO), police and other officials that occupy most of India's roads (B. Singh, personal communication, February 14, 2020). Drivers are also on the roads for long stretches of time with many drivers like Yadav Chawla spending two to three months working continuous 15 to 18-hour shifts on the roads driving constantly before coming back to their homes (Y. Chawla, personal communication, February 8, 2020). Further, the occupation is one of the least respected jobs in the country and there is a lack of dignity of labour associated with truck drivers and their work (International Road Transport Union, 2018). These realities of truck drivers' lives and occupations both influence truck art and also add to the meaning and symbolism in it.



Figure 9. A photo of the side view of the head or face of a truck in Indore.

The extent of truck drivers' contributions on trucks is fairly diverse, ranging from contributions only to the design of the cabin to contributions to the overall design of the truck. For some drivers who are employed after a truck's design and decoration was complete, their contributions to the art mostly come in the form of the individual decorations they make to personalize a truck's cabin. Apart from this, they may ask for the addition of certain elements on a truck's decoration when a truck is undergoing regular overhaul and maintenance. However, the Indian trucking industry is built on loyalty and commitment and most drivers in India have long-term working relationships with specific owners (V. Mane, personal communication, February 10, 2020). Thus, when a new truck is being built and decorated, drivers who are assigned to these trucks by the owners of the trucks are involved in the process. Most drivers accompany a truck to the building and painting workshops (V. Mane, personal communication, 2020). They are asked to wait around in the truck body and painting workshop while a truck is built and decorated - a process which can take multiple days and weeks; and are in regular conversations with the body shop owners and workers, truck artists and the truck owners. Even in cases where an owner isn't as conducive about the inclusion of drivers' ideas on a truck's decoration, many of their ideas and

requests trickle into the design of a truck as a result of the time that they spend in these workshops while a truck is being built and decorated. However, in some cases, the artist refuses to listen to the driver as a result of their associations with the owner. The nature of the drivers' role is entirely dependent on the relationships between the stakeholders.

In terms of the exterior of the truck, most drivers requests' are for the inclusion of symbols pertaining to their religious beliefs, talismanic and fetish symbols for auspicion and luck and a variety of writings and calligraphy. Religious symbols are a manifestation of the drivers' faiths and their beliefs. They serve as a reminder for drivers of a constant caring companion on their arduous journeys in the form of god. These symbols represent the most common way in which drivers personalize these trucks and the spaces they will occupy for the years to come.

However, requests for the inclusion of religious symbols on the exterior of the truck are rarely ever granted to drivers - the exterior of the truck is where most owners choose to represent their faiths. Drivers' requests come in the form of the construction of small *mandirs* or temples.. These are small structures in the cabins of trucks within which the idol representing the drivers' faiths are placed. They are almost always placed in front of the seats so the drivers can look at them and pray while driving. Other symbols pertaining to drivers' faiths are also painted around the cabin such as the Khanda for Sikh drivers and the Crescent Moon and Star for Muslim drivers.

The personalization of these trucks is key for the drivers to feel comfortable and at-home in their trucks (W. Ahmed, personal communication, February 8, 2020). They act as markers of drivers' identities, faiths, beliefs, realities and hopes. Many drivers request for spaces to hang pictures or place objects such as bangles and small furnishings that remind them of their families, their loved ones and their homes within the cabin of the truck. Others ask for paintings that beautifully depict nature, rural women, idealised versions of life in villages. Most drivers hail from villages in rural India and the transition to life in trucking which is dangerous, brutal and mentally draining is challenging. These paintings, portraits, symbols and representations of idealised elements of life act as important reminders of their roots, culture, and a simpler life. Drivers' requests for these are mainly because these representations help drivers cope with their challenging lives on the road.



Figure 10. A photo of a driver enjoying his leisure time in the cabin of his truck.

Drivers who are either owners or have the permission of the owners for the inclusion of their ideas on the exterior of a truck usually ask for a variety of writings on the exterior of a truck. These writings include everything from the names of their wives, children and other family members, to phrases such as “Hum Do Humaare Do” to poetry and one liners ranging from deep to humorous. This is an entirely subjective process for the drivers with each driver having their own idea of what they would like to be written on the truck. Many ask the artists to write the names of their children or give names to their trucks which they ask the artists to write (A. Kumar, personal communication, February 14, 2020). Others ask for the inclusion of a phrase of poetry, usually on the back of the truck. The reason for the prevalence of these requests is the popularity of this practice, with most trucks having one or more of the combination of a name given to the truck, writings of the names of the drivers’ relatives or children and phrases from poetry. The popularity of this practice results in most drivers asking for the inclusion of one or more of these, with each request being personalized to their own thoughts and ideas for the truck.

Finally, the drivers ask for talismanic and fetish objects that symbolise good luck and the deterrence of evil. Drivers are constantly aware of the risk that their jobs pose to their lives and health. They are in constant fear of meeting with accidents and losing their lives or their occupation. For these reasons, drivers ask for symbols that represent superstitious beliefs or are associated with luck or the deterrence of evil. Interestingly, there are many superstitious phrases

and writings that drivers ask for the inclusion of such as “Buri nazar waale tera muh kaala,” which is a Hindi phrase to ward off evil. Uniquely, these phrases are usually painted in a stylised manner combining symbols representing superstitious beliefs with calligraphy. In these, the truck artists use eye-catching fonts and awesome representations of superstitious symbols as a means of engaging an onlooker’s focus on these phrases that are associated with luck and the deterrence of evil.

Truck Owners

Truck owners are the financiers of the work on a truck and their ideas and approval holds paramount importance in the design of the trucks (B. Singh, personal communication, February 12, 2020). Even so, a majority of truck owners are the most disconnected from the process of the building and decoration of the trucks. This is because their contributions usually stem from singular conversations with the body shop owners and artists, post which they aren’t present to oversee the work on the truck (N. A. Khan, personal communication, February 10, 2020). However, there are many truck owners like Honey Singh who pay attention to the finer aspects of the design and decoration of their trucks (H. Singh, personal communication, February 11, 2020). In cases where the owner is disconnected from the process and limits their role to a few conversations with the body shop owners and artists, it is the truck drivers who, in many ways assume the role of overseeing the work on a truck. Only when big issues spring up or a truck’s delivery is delayed that the truck owner converses with the body shop owner again. These singular conversations that the truck owners have with the body shop owners and truck artists shape the basic design of the truck. Most owners do not delve into the nitty-gritties of the art: they leave that up to the artist (M. Zuber, personal communication, February 13, 2020). They generally provide a template of the minimum requirements of the truck (N. A. Khan, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

In the first step of the process of the building and decoration of the truck, each owner is given a specific choice of the style in which they would like their truck to be built. Here, the style refers both to the style of the body of the truck as well as the art on the truck, both of which vary between regions and are associated with each region as the style of that region. For example, trucks from Jammu and Kashmir have a different style of making and decorating the cabins. In terms of art, there are markers of this regional identity such as colour schemes, amount

of decoration, and so on. The styles referred to here are not rigid and different styles come together to shape the design and decoration of a single truck. A truck may have a cabin which is made and decorated in the “Jammu” style of Jammu and Kashmir while its exterior is made and decorated in the “Rajput” style of Rajasthan. This is usually because of divergences in owners’ ideas for the truck and drivers’ ideas for the truck. Drivers occupy the cabins as their most personal spaces and thus can include their ideas for the finer points of the cabin’s design. Owners have a far larger interest in the design and decoration of the exterior of the truck not just for the aesthetic beauty of the truck but the role that the art on the exterior of a truck plays in advertising a truck owner’s business (Munshi, personal communication, February 9, 2020). Further, the identities of owners and drivers and the location of where a truck is being built and decorated have an effect on the style or styles present on a truck. Honey Singh, a truck owner hailing from Punjab with a fleet of trucks highlights how one of his trucks was built in Indore by artists based in the city with a driver hailing from Bengal (H. Singh, personal communication, February 11, 2020). This leads to the design and decoration of that truck in a manner in which the truck has elements from all three regional styles and elements that represent the identities, tastes and preferences of each of the stakeholders.

The aforementioned regional styles only provide general templates for the bodywork, decoration and colours of the trucks. Most owners’ briefs are that their trucks and cabins be built in a certain style and painted in certain colours that they like or which is the standard for their fleet (B. Singh, personal communication, February 12, 2020). Often, and this is the case for both owners and drivers who can make decisions of the decoration on a truck, an owner or a driver will show pictures of one or many trucks that they admire to the artist and ask for their trucks to be built in a similar style (N. A. Khan, personal communication, February 10, 2020). After this initial discussion, they express specific ideas about finer aspects of the decoration and writing on a truck.

Universally, all trucks have the names and information of the truck owners and their companies on the sides of the trucks (G. Singh, personal communication, February 12, 2020). This is not only for the fulfilment of regulatory requirements but acts as advertisements for the owners and their companies to be contacted for future contract work. Thus, owners ask for the names of the companies and their contact information to be written in large fonts for onlookers to easily read and note down. Since most truck artists and body shop owners are well versed with

basic regulatory requirements, this aspect of the design of the truck is rarely, if ever, discussed with the owner. There is an unspoken understanding that these basic requirements will be managed by the truck artists.

Keeping this in mind, most owners specifically do ask for nationalistic symbols and phrases (M. Zuber, personal communication, February 13, 2020). These phrases and symbols have a dual meaning. The first, is that these symbols represent the nationalism and pride towards their nation of these owners. The second, which is as important, is the fact that these symbols and phrases are added to appease the sentiments of the various government personnel - from Regional Transport Office (RTO) Officials to policemen to flying squads - that regularly stop and inspect these trucks. The trucking industry is riddled with corruption, with officials regularly stopping vehicles and threatening fines unless being paid bribes; even if a truck is fully compliant. Legislation varies between states and different RTOs and thus, most drivers are illiterate and are not aware of their rights or the laws to counter. As a result, they have to shell out large amounts of fines to various officials throughout the course of their journeys to keep the trucks moving. By painting several nationalistic symbols and phrases, the owners' hopes are that of officials not unnecessarily stopping their trucks and drivers on the roads and asking for large fines.

Owners also have other specific requests regarding the decoration on a truck. Owners usually ask truck artists to adorn religious symbols and markers of their faith in the topmost panel or crown of the truck (Munshi, personal communication, February 9, 2020). The symbolism within the prominent display of these faith-based symbols, motifs and phrases is different than religious symbols that drivers usually ask for. These symbols serve not only as odes of respect by the owners to their faiths and gods, but are also usually tied to hopes of wealth and prosperity. By asking for the inclusion of markers of religious identity on these trucks such as paintings of the hawk and the eagle found within Sikhism and the Hindu goddess Lakshmi which represent wealth and prosperity in these religions, many owners hope that these would bring them wealth and prosperity through the trucks. Specific writings and phrases also make up a big portion of the owners' requests and demands. Many like for the names of their children and family members to be written on their trucks as markers of their love towards their families. Owners do tend to request and demand the inclusion of superstitious symbols, however, the prevalence of this is far less common than it is in the drivers' case.

Truck owners who ask for simple designs or are on a budget usually limit their contributions to the aforementioned points. However, many truck owners like Honey Singh wish for their trucks to be painted extravagantly and ask for lavish and detailed decorations on their trucks (H. Singh, personal communication, February 11, 2020). In such cases, the design and looks of these trucks act as symbols of the owners' pride: these trucks are their livelihood and the owners wish for them to look as beautiful as possible. Here, these trucks are looked as feminized objects that require decoration, care and upkeep and where their beauty is used as a marker of pride. They serve to distinguish an owner or company's vehicle from the rest. Many owners state that it also makes good business sense, as these trucks operate not only as large canvases for the decoration on them but serve as large billboards for potential clients to approach these owners and their companies for work.

Such lavishly designed trucks often represent a dizzying amalgamation of colours, styles, phrases, symbols, motifs and fonts and are dazzlingly beautiful. Here, the only limiting factors are the extent of the artist's imagination and that of the owner's pocket. Vivid landscapes of nature, life in rural India, beautiful women and deities painted on the back or one side of the truck; a variety of symbols, phrases and motifs written in the most eye-catching and bold fonts and styles representing everything from faith, superstition to even references to popular culture to even portraits of the truck owners in one case: these represent only some of what the design of these trucks contain. The elements of the design of such trucks have multiple semiotic messages. They firstly represent the owner's pride, their access to capital and their ability to spend these fairly large amounts of money on the decoration of their trucks. They also are exaggerated representations of an owner's personal choices and identities. Lastly, the overall design of the truck represents the hopes of the owners for the appreciation of their trucks and also their hopes for more clients and work for their companies and trucks.

Truck Painters and Truck Artists

Truck painters and truck artists are the ones who translate the ideas that they receive from owners and drivers to the actual decoration and art that is seen inside and outside a truck. They assume multiple roles in this process - as translators, illustrators and experts in art - to ensure that the final design and decoration of a truck is not only aesthetically pleasing but also in accordance

with the requirements and requests given to them. Thus, their inputs and artistic decisions are of paramount importance in studying the symbolism of truck art.

Several painters and different artists are involved in the art on a single truck. After the truck body and the shell of the cabin is completely built, initial coats of primer and base colours are added by painters. Subsequently, multiple artists start work on the truck with each artist catering to specific kinds of symbols, phrases and motifs that are to be painted on the truck. These aren't decided at random but artists are employed because of their expertise in one or many skills that are needed in truck art - such as calligraphy, blending of colours, landscape painting, to name a few.



Figure 11. A portrait of a worker assembling various parts of a truck in a workshop in Indore.

Each artist cultivates their skills over time - while most are fairly proficient in most of the aforementioned skills and categories of work, they hone in on specific skills that constitute their role in a truck's art. For example, artists like Mohammed Aslum specialize in calligraphy, artists like Gurmeet Singh specialize in painting of landscapes and symbols while artists Mohammed

Zuber and Nafees Ahmed Khan are proficient in all skills but focus on detailing and the painting of intricate symbols and writings (M. Aslum, personal communication, February 13, 2020; G. Singh, personal communication, February 12, 2020; M. Zuber, personal communication, February 13, 2020; N. A. Khan, personal communication, February 10, 2020). Further, there exists a hierarchy in these artists with the senior most artists being the most renowned, respected and paid while junior artists are often seen as apprentices and aren't given as much respect or paid as well. In many cases, most of the work on a truck is done by junior artists with senior artists like Nafees Ahmed Khan working solely on the most intricate symbols, motifs and phrases present on a truck (N.A. Khan, personal communication, February 10, 2020).



Figure 12. A portrait of a truck artist alongside his intricate work on the side of a truck in a workshop in Indore.

After finishing the initial phase of the painting and decoration of a truck and once the requirements of the owners and drivers are met, truck artists have a lot of blank space left on the trucks. Most artists wish to not leave any blank spaces on the trucks that they paint, especially

when there aren't significant budget issues from the owner. In such cases, different truck artists fill these spaces through their imaginations and references. In these blank spaces, they paint everything from nationalistic symbols like the national flag to small landscapes of nature, paintings of palaces, symbols representing prosperity, and much more. These spaces, which, in many cases dominate the art on trucks, are left to the skills and imagination of these artists.

Truck artists make several consequential choices in the painting of a truck: they make important choices in everything from the colour scheme to fonts, styles and the placement of many symbols, phrases and motifs. Senior truck artists are seen as experts of their fields, as they rightfully should, with most having years of experience in the occupation. With experience, senior artists also gain recognition and reputation, with many owners sending their trucks to these artists' workshops based on their work that they've seen or on the basis of word of mouth from other truck owners. While senior truck artists have the final decision in a truck's art, most of the artists working on a truck have a lot of autonomy in the art on the trucks. This is because there are hundreds of small decisions that are to be made in the art on a truck. And, with each artist being proficient in their field and senior artists not having as much time to dedicate to a single truck, many decisions are left up to the judgement of the individual artists and the art then reflects all these artists' tastes, sensibilities, thoughts and ideas.

Thus, the choices that these artists make could not just be categorized as for purely aesthetic purposes. While it is true that many of these choices are made on the basis of the aesthetic beauty of the art as perceived by the artists, these aesthetic decisions reflect both the artists' identities, beliefs and hopes as well as those representing the same for owners and drivers. Truck artists still adhere to a certain set of artistic tools and symbols when they paint trucks. Their choice of fonts and styles is dictated by their tastes and also represent their perception of the popular and prevalent styles in the country. The painting of symbols such as the national flag, the cow, landscapes of nature and villages that these artists paint in the blank spaces of these trucks also represent the identities, aspirations and beliefs of these artists. It highlights the artists' understanding of the identities, aspirations and beliefs of the owners and drivers in their limited interaction. It showcases the commonalities within the identities, aspirations and beliefs of the various stakeholders of the trucking industry. This is especially significant as the work of these artists transcends the art on these trucks from merely aesthetically pleasing to art that conveys the lives, identities, aspirations, faiths, beliefs and realities of truck artists, truck drivers and truck owners.

Other Factors

The associations and intentions of stakeholders are the primary signifiers of the meaning embedded in truck art and its elements. However, they are not the sole signifier with factors such as geography and styles, legislation, types of symbols and the placement of symbols also playing a defining role in the symbolism and meaning behind truck art. Thus, it is necessary to study the role that these factors play as well in determining the symbolism in truck art.

Geography and Styles

The primary focus of this study was to understand whether there is a common syntax in truck art in India. Truck art in India does have a common syntax; however, it is important to highlight the geographical variance that is also prevalent within the country. The geographical character of the decoration of a truck plays a significant role in the truck art in India. There are multiple regions throughout the country that have their own unique practices in the building and decoration of a truck. Within the trucking industry, this is common knowledge, with each region's practices being denoted as the 'style' of the region. In this section, we analyze the impact of geography and styles on truck art in India.

Geographical or regional variances are signified as the styles of those regions in Indian truck art. In this study, we have identified multiple regions that have their distinct geographical or regional styles. They are, to name a few, the "Jammu" or the "Kashmiri" style representing Jammu and Kashmir, the "Indori" style representing Indore, the "Rajput" style representing Rajasthan, the "Punjabi" style representing Punjab and the "South" style representing the southern states of India and especially the city of Visakhapatnam. These styles refer to the region where a truck is made and the practices of the building and decoration of these trucks that are unique to these regions. Further, while these styles are characterised as regional styles, they refer to the practices of cities and towns with developed truck building and painting industries in these states such as Amritsar in Punjab, Jammu in Jammu and Kashmir, Jaisalmer in Rajasthan and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.

These geographical styles are fluid markers of a truck's regional identity: while each region has its own distinct style, artists and truck body builders do engage in the reproduction of styles from other regions based on the preferences of the truck owners and truck drivers. Furthermore, the prevalence of this practice of reproduction means that finding the true origins and distinct

markers of a certain style is nearly impossible as the stakeholders have differing understandings of the elements of certain styles. While there is a general understanding of some of the markers of a certain regional style, such as the unique design of the crown of trucks of the trucks of the Jammu style, the bright colour schemes of the Punjabi style, depictions of Rajasthani folk art in the Rajput style; these styles themselves have been influenced by the practices of other regional styles. This is important to note as this indicates the fact that while regional variances are prevalent in truck art in India, the art itself is dynamic and fluid wherein each region's art influences the others.

Coming to the symbolism that stems from the geographical styles, the practices of each region are shaped by the intentions, choices and sensibilities of the region's stakeholders, especially the artists: Rajasthani truck art depicts popular Rajasthani figures such as Maharana Pratap Singh, trucks made in Uttar Pradesh frequently depict monuments such as the Taj Mahal, Indori trucks are marked by the finer nuances in the painting and writing styles of the decoration on them. The regionality of these trucks thus directly stems from the individuals who work on these trucks which is what defines and signifies the underlying meaning of the elements of each style.

Legislation

India's truck industry is unique in its composition. Original Equipment manufacturers such as Tata, Ashok Leyland and Eicher majorly only supply the chassis of these trucks, with the body being built by the owners in one of thousands of body and paint shops around the country, according to the owner's specifications. In essence, the industry is highly unorganized. Further, there is a lack of universal legislation that governs the building of the truck bodies, with each state or RTO having its own specific guidelines. Different RTOs and different states have different regulations and specifications in terms of the building of the truck and what kinds of decoration is permissible. Further, there are a few general rules that all trucks have to adhere to, as prescribed in the Central Motor Vehicles Act of 1989. These general rules form a template of symbols, motifs and phrases that are present universally on all trucks in India - without them, trucks cannot legally haul goods. These include, to name a few, the mention of the permit that the truck is operated under, the owner's information, the truck's information in terms of its load capacity, registration, etc., the national flag. Furthermore, symbols and phrases are added by the truck owners to appease

officials who check the trucks to ensure that they are allowed to carry on their journeys with minimal inconvenience.

Syntax/Placement of Symbols

The placement of a symbol, motif or phrase on a truck is also a signifier of the meaning behind it. There is an underlying order to truck art in India - its syntax, and this dictates larger truck art practices in India. There are specific reasons for a symbol, motif or phrase's placement on a truck's front vs. the back or its side which are important in understanding the meanings of these symbols, motifs and phrases within the context of their paradigms. The syntax of truck art dictates that we analyse the symbols, motifs and phrases on each truck within the context of the truck and the decisions that the stakeholders made in organizing the art on a truck. There are a multitude of reasons for why the syntax of Indian truck art is as it is today: explaining that in adequate detail is beyond the scope of this study. However, in saying that, it is still necessary to explain the impact of the syntax of Indian truck art we have identified and its impact on the meaning of the truck.

As covered in the previous sections of this chapter, the type of a symbol, motif or phrase would also dictate where it is placed on a truck. Religious symbols are placed out of reach of an ordinary hand for ensuring they aren't damaged severely in accidents. Religious symbols are also not placed on the sides of the cabins near footwells as a marker of respect and their sanctity. Talismanic symbols and phrases pertaining to superstitious beliefs are usually placed on the back of the truck in styles that are eye-catching for the deterrence of evil. The sides are reserved for information about the truck and its owner as it is easy to see that information from the sides and thereby clients can contact the owners for work. The iconic "Horn Please" and "Use Dipper at Night" phrases are placed on the backs of trucks for functional reasons that drivers who approach the trucks from behind adhere to these important safety practices. All of these practices represent the fact that these messages all serve different functionalities and purposes within the paradigm of truck art: the placement of owner's information on the back of a truck may not be useful in the same way as the phrase "Horn Please" written on the sides of a truck would be meaningless. Attempts to understand elements of truck art cannot be successful without understanding the role that the syntax has on the art itself, and how changes to the syntax of a truck would result in a transformation of the art, its character and its meaning.

Conclusion

Semiotics and syntax are vital when attempting to understand the art that adorns the trucks of India. As explained, it involves the understanding of what the standard symbols are, where they are placed on the truck and the reasoning behind its usage and placement. Elias (2003) conducted a similar study of semiotics in truck art in the context of Pakistan. Using his system of categorisation, we have categorised Indian truck art and its symbols into six different categories based on what they symbolise and represent.

Overt religious symbolism specifically relates to figures that are only used in cases of indication of religions. This can be applied across various Indian religions. They could be images of religious deities themselves. Talismanic and fetish items work outside the traditional bounds of religion and are usually sources of protection and luck to the truck, its containments and the people associated with the truck. The third category holds talismanic symbols and figures of religious importance. Animals such as cows, fish and hawks, along with eyes and flowers all hold such power of representation. Romanticised elements of life are seen, depicted through scenes of village life, women and natural scenery. Figures that indicate features of modern life and a country's identity are sorted into another category. They could feature popular cultural imagery and political symbols. Non-religious calligraphy makes up the last category which involves all forms of legal and general lettering.

All of these motifs are then placed in specific regions and sides of the truck. Every side contains specific types and sets of motifs that create an arrangement unique to forming the identity of the truck. The front happens to be the most concentrated of religious symbolism. Almost all parts of this side are decorated in some way. It becomes the face of the truck, establishing its identity on the road. Ownership of the truck too, is established here. The sides become moving adverts. They hold the names and details of the transport companies, truck body workshops and artists. The back of the truck uses the longer viewership time it has with the observer behind it, to its advantage. Hence, instructional phrasing and other such phrasing, along with large paintings are situated here.

The general understanding is that truck art is restricted to the external face of the truck, but here, the cabin of the truck too is observed in the same manner. It mainly holds the preferential items of the driver. Hangings and tassellings too, adorn its interiors. Containing personal sentimental possessions, it can be seen as a center of religious items.

While on the outset to many laypeople, the art form may be seen as unstructured or without meaning, that is a false assumption. Every motif, symbol and phrase present on a truck signifies a deeper meaning. The art form as a whole is a giant canvas that paints the lives and stories of the people who are associated with it.

The stakeholders of truck art - the drivers, owners and artists - are what make the art and to whom the art has the most meaning. Without their contributions and without their effort, the artform would cease to exist. Their contributions, their intentional acts of the inclusion, placement and stylizations of the elements of truck art are the primary factor that has shaped the truck art that we see today. Thus, the primary factor that contributes to the symbolism and the meanings of truck art are the intentions of the stakeholders.

Factors such as legislation, geographical variance and styles and the syntax of truck art are also important in signifying the meaning within the art. The study also highlights the overlaps between the aforementioned factors. They significantly influence and are simultaneously influenced by the primary factor: intentions or reasons of the stakeholders.

The geography and styles represent the diversity in India's truck art and the regional character and styles of the trucks that are built and decorated in the different cities, states and regions of the country. These markets of a truck's identity, albeit fluid, represent the intentions of the stakeholders hailing from these regions, their expression of their lives and stories and their own interpretation of the practices and culture that defines the truck art of India.

Legislation as a factor speaks about the governmental factors, most significantly, the legislation (or lack thereof) that influences, both directly and indirectly, the truck art of India and its identity and meaning. The lack of significant nationwide legislation that stipulates common standards for the building of truck bodies and their decoration has made truck art what it is today. The unorganized nature of the truck body building and painting industry has left huge markers in terms of the significance of the meaning embedded in the truck art of this country, and its elements. While some symbols, motifs and phrases are universally required to be present on trucks, others are painted intentionally by the intentions and decisions of truck owners, drivers and painters as a means of appeasing officials engaging in corrupt practices that are omnipresent on Indian roads. These are significant in adding to the meaning behind the elements of truck art.

Lastly, the organization of truck art in India and its syntax play a key role in its symbolism and meaning. The syntax identified within this study wherein the symbols, motifs and phrases in

India's trucks are arranged on the front, back and the sides of trucks in a specific manner are characteristic of India's truck art. The syntax thus has an unquestionable role in not only the artform and its identity, but also the meaning that is signified by and within the art.

References

- Adnan, A. (2014, September 12). The art of loving. Retrieved from <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/the-art-of-loving>
- Central Motor Vehicle Rules – Technical Standing Committee. (2008). *Code of Practice for Construction and Approval of Truck Cabs, Truck Bodies and Trailers* (Report No. AIS-093). Pune: The Automotive Research Association Of India. Retrieved from https://morth.gov.in/sites/default/files/ASI/PUB_3_22_2010_9_57_24_AM_AIS-093.pdf
- Elias, J. (2003). On Wings of Diesel: Spiritual Space and Religious Imagination in Pakistani Truck Decoration. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, (43), 187-202.
- Elias, J. (2005). Truck Decoration and Religious Identity: Material Culture and Social Function in Pakistan. *Material Religion: The Journal of Object, Art, Belief*, 1(1), 48-71.
- Haroon, D. (2018, June 25). Bedford truck - A true automotive icon. Retrieved from <https://www.pakwheels.com/blog/bedford-truck-true-automotive-icon/>
- International Road Transport Union. (2018, October 17). Driver shortage for trucking industry – an India perspective. Retrieved from <https://www.iru.org/resources/newsroom/driver-shortage-trucking-industry-india-perspective>
- Madan, A. (2018). Visual Semiotics of Truck Art in India: From Art on Trucks to a Digital Art Style. Retrieved from: <https://www.scss.tcd.ie/publications/theses/diss/2018/TCD-SCSS-DISSERTATION-2018-060.pdf>
- McKenzie, S. (2015). Pimp my ride: The psychedelic world of Indian truck art. Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/gallery/india-truck-art-design-travel/index.html>

- Ministry of Finance - Department of Economic Affairs. (2019). Economic Survey 2018-19. (Vol. 2, pp. 224-225). New Delhi: Government Of India.
Retrieved from
<https://www.thehinducentre.com/resources/article28283454.ece/binary/Economic%20Survey%20Volume%20II%20Complete%20PDF.pdf>
- Muthiah, S., & Gopalan, K. N. (2008, December 22). The first wheels roll into India.
Retrieved from
https://www.business-standard.com/article/management/the-first-wheels-roll-into-india-108122301090_1.html
- National Transport Development Policy Committee & Routledge. (2014).
India Transport Report: Moving India to 2032 (1st ed., Vol. 2, pp. 29–32). New Delhi.
- Novakovic, K. (2018). Gods of the Road: Spiritual Dimensions of Vehicular Art in The Indian Subcontinent. Retrieved from: http://www.etd.ceu.edu/2018/novakovic_konstantin.pdf
- Pierce, C. S., (1998). Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce. Thoemmes Press
- Press Trust of India. (2018, June 20). Truckers battle sleep deprivation, other health issues: Study. Retrieved from
https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/truckers-battle-sleep-deprivation-Other-health-issues-study-118062000745_1.html
- Saussure, F. (1974). Course in General Linguistics. Fontana.
- Schmid, A. (2000). *Truck Art as Arena of Contest*. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(4), 235–241. doi:10.1080/09718923.2000.11892273.
- Sheikh, S.Z. (2018). Impact of Truck Art, as popular culture on Pakistani Society. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research*, 6, 1061-1070.

Stewart, J. (2018, April 18). Colorful 'Jingle Trucks' Rule the Road in Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://mymodernmet.com/pakistan-truck-art/>

Suman, S., & Mirche, I. (Director). (April 14, 2013). *Horn Please* [Film]. Talkies films.

The Motor Vehicles Act. (1988).

देखो मगर प्यार से

