The role of art in society - especially under the dictatorship - has been so enormous in the history of that nation and time that it leaves me feeling disheartened. In its broader perspective, therefore, instead of any scholarly discourse, I confine myself to my country and present my views in an artist's sketchy manner.

Broader speaking, in visual art, some artists are interested in solving the problems of style and technique while others use style and technique to express their social and political views and in the process undertake "artistic responsibility." For them art does not exist merely to entertain and gratify the senses only. It plays a role in the improvement of our collective existence. They argue that, so long as there are socio-political wrongs to be righted and as long as an unjust and ugly condition requires change, art must participate through visual education and motivate people's attitude which can lead eventually to awareness for better society.

Dictatorship enhances the urge. Environment and personnel psychic factor also affects artistic output. As an artist, while living in north, in a posh locality and amongst the elite at Lahore, Pindi and Peshawar, used to paint occasional Landscapes and frequently compositions of voluptuous boxer beauties. During student days, I had enjoyed great popularity as a painter of attractive young ladies in Lahore. Besides sensual nudes in blues and pink, rivaled by Colin David only, who was my contemporaneity at the Punjab University. While in Sindh, events took over me and I reacted to life and reality around me and earned the distinction of being first painter in the sub-continent to be censored. While not civilin dictated to curb my freedom of expression, no official dictated to curb my freedom of movement, by not allowing me to go abroad. 

I was不允许 me to go abroad. In this ignorance the Mr Ali Sami was allowing me to go abroad. In this ignorance the Mr Ali Sami was arranging my solos at Indus Gallery and later C.G. Mansuri of Dawn and the Federation Union of Journalists who demanded sanctions and sponsorship of my works in 1983 at Islamabad.

Surely everyone else, has his or her heretics to keep aloof from the masses. Probably others wanted to go for higher values and sublime or aesthetic that I missed in my visual surrounding experience and expression, resulted from seeing terror let loose in the province of Sindh, since early 80's. Those unmovied by ghastly events, too are artists indeed, as we have other professionals, such as lawyers, in words of a columnist, "all brothers in law". Some prefer collaboration with an authoritarian regime and discover 'Doctrine of Necessity', others object to amendments and refuse to take oath as judges. One gets kicked out, others get kicked-out. Some get lucrative assignments as legal advisors for illegal activities, others prefer to join Human Rights and fight for the cause of down-trodden. Artists in Pakistan had similar choices and challenges. Who chose what, is better to leave the question unanswered. If collaborator, is a harsh word, with what other name be described that horrific Calligraphic fever and diablery turned epidemic boosted by Marghaz Morons who arranged wagons for carriage driven down the Indus by Ghori shayar unseen, Deshan da Raja, the Indus Person of the Indus Saga.

Just to please ruling junta and strengthening religion of religion by the general, doyen of calligraphy in Pakistan, claimed, Ghori guided his hand, while in India, he did erotic couple painted in Katipur, for that in fidel's land, love-making was permissive on Juhi Beach as Lord Krishna, not the General was to be pleased a la Khajuraho...

During high noon Martial Law, prominent artists were seen, with tapes on their hand, measuring walls and moving around officer's messes in cantonments - the only place of peace and tranquility.

We, in Pakistan, experienced authoritarianism early on, for us it is Hobs on's choice in opting for lesser evil, Dictators. The Civil or the Un-civil, lately I was corrected that uncivil was more civil and less ruthless than what one experienced from the civil. Specially in matters of tolerance and freedom of expression.

I had my first brush with dictatorship during the Black garden rule in Lahore. I was a lecturer at the Punjab University in 1964-65. I wrote an article on role of art in the developing world.

Somewhere, I had mentioned Karachi University's inability to understand art's economic and industrial role, or as articulation that was ever understood and used as Goblet in Germany and by our own, born again faithful, Goblets of Pakistan, who skillfully missed arts and culture, while heading the Disinformation cell. Dictator was presented as saviour and benefactor, propaganda unleashed presented, Decade of Deduction, as Decade of Reforms, artists participated wholeheartedly. Nationalisation of press was followed by the delivery of that un-named PNGA, Pakistan National Council of the Arts, a subsidy of Disinformation cell and a Ministry called anti-culture, headed by men of agriculture who saw to it that art and culture agree. Poet Faiz left PNGA in its ugly infancy, he soon realised futility of his presence as decay heading decay. Ministry's and PNGA's achievements were witnessed as paper on parade grounds, held on national days, in floating of culture. Art and artists, along with horse and cattle, lead by breeders from Jhang, Multan and Rehman Deh, marching past to martial tunes, band and wagons, saluting the generals and culminating at musical sires with Bana Khana at Pindi cantonment, where CMLA President freely mixed up with plate-inbuid artists and sermonised to paint Islamic ideology that he was champion of... "Sensitive" artists were plebeians with commissions, sharing feeckhs and kalab. One leading portrait painter of Lahore presented Zia's portrait to Zia, the General with rosy cheeks painted from his retouched photograph. Painter was awarded Pride of Performance, other presented "Allah" in calligraphy and recited his spiritual dream in which Allama Iqbal had told him to convey his greeting to Manto-Morin CMLA, for his Islamisation in the Republic. One did not visualise Allama's torment in his grave, but General Suhb was seen visibly pleased, the artist was given commission for Iqbal Memorial and in Itkady, the Pride of Performance as token gratis. Once chronic landscape painter, at Islamabad, he deviated from his genre and painted calligraphy for one exhibition. But his claim for Pride of Performance was verified by another General Suhb and was duly awarded.

In my ignorance, I had counted number of artists in Pakistan, a lot of tips, it was on my refusal to then DG PNGA for Portrait painting for President House, I was informed by him that there are hundred painters already submitted 300 portraits. Artists from all over country out raced each other for painting portraits in shervani only then realised, we have second line of defenders of ideology in such a motivated army of artists. As enough was not enough, in the evening, leading portrait painter appeared on National Idiot Box, and disclosed that he had corrected his masterpiece, grotesque visage, in shervani, as suggested by the General, implying that the General had an eye for art that people wrongly regarded abnormal.

During our worst dictatorship days, the significant art form came from un candies neglected performing arts groups - the theatre group led by Ali Ahmed and couple of Aslam, Inam and Anwar, joined by enlightened director, Goethe Institute, Dr Peter Hosewich, Grip and Brecht plays were excellently adapted to local situation. While in Lahore, Madiha's Afsa and Lok Rah (Punjab group) provided solace that "all is not lost." Jamil Dehlavi, Mustaq Gander filmed films of class and commitment. One wished visual art too had such a matching example. On the contrary, by and large, our painters' role has been of colossal indifferency and apathy.

Art in Pakistan is a tale of two cities. One prefer City Escapes, while others stubbornly anchored to Landscapes minus people. In between, some artists called Foreign Office released exhibitions on contracts such as on Afghanistan, Bosnia and Kashmir etc. Through their media-hyped image, and pending visas at Indian Consulate, leading artists and teachers sold their "Iehad" under fake names of their Tablins. Art-corruption in pipeline. Our sensitive artists do have contributed in making Pakistan the second most corrupt country of the world. As a habit, we must care in every judgement. Our statue qualified for the top slot, never mind the disgrace to the "Land of the pure", so long as there was a Gold in the pure.

Elsewhere, there were Nepali's, there were David, Gericault, Delacroix and Courbet, Germany gave us Max Beckmann, Gros, Kuby, Kollwitz and Modernism. Becker. Along with Hitler's rise, Germany produced New Objectivity and anti-Militarist art, Franco motivated Guernica, and Mexican Fascists faced River Schults and Orsoco.

I conclude, quoting Bernard Shaw: "the reasonable man adapts himself to the world, the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself, therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man." How many unreasonable we had? Verdict I leave to the audience.

(A paper read by A.R. Nagori at the "Art Under Dictatorship", at Goethe Institute, Karachi)