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An Analytical Study of Islamic Talismanic Shirts as an Inspiration for Contemporary Fashion Trends in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The research paper discusses the history, procedure, purpose and function of the Islamic Talismanic shirts as an off-shoot of inscribed textiles called tiraz. The shirts have been decorated manually by ink and pen with prayers, inscriptions from the Holy Quran and Vefk and Abjad grids/ waqf al-a'dad (numeric grids) as Talismans for the protections of the wearer. Most of the specimens discussed in the paper are currently housed in museums, palaces and personal collections. The Talismanic shirts belong to the era between 15th to 19th century in the Safavid, Ottoman, South Asian and West African cultures. The aim of the study is to throw light on the historic significance of wearable textiles with Calligraphy, the reasons for the downfall of the craft in Muslim societies and to trace out the revival and inspiration in contemporary fashion trends in Pakistan. The study relates the historic use of Arabic calligraphy in Talismanic shirts with the contemporary fashion trends by analyzing the leading Pakistani Textile brands and their products through online fashion catalogues and store visits in the city of Lahore, Pakistan. The research discusses examples of the contemporary brands by comparison with the collections of the historic Talismanic shirts and traces out the similarities in composition, layout, color scheme and motif elements. The paper concludes with proposals for the acceptance and promotion of Apparel Textiles with non-religious Calligraphy in Pakistan as a break from the typical commercial floral and geometric trends.

Introduction

History of Amulets and Talisman

Since the pre-historic times, the quest of people to obtain peace of mind, protection and good health and financial success has led them to use certain charms, amulets and talismans as material manifestations of spirituality. These were worn to communicate and influence the gods and goddesses ensuring success and stability. An amulet is a written inscription in a metal, wooden or fabric covering worn for supernatural protection. A charm is something believed to bring good luck, health and happiness. A talisman is believed to have a spiritual property to protect the wearer as a part of a ritual[1]. These have been used by the ancient civilizations

[1] Gary R. Varner, *The History & Use of Amulets, Charms and Talismans* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press, 2008), 6.

and religions like Egyptian, Indus, Chinese, Greek, Christian medieval time period and Islam[2]. In Islamic history, Talismans have been written in a language of *Ilm-al-Huruf,* numerically[3].



Figure 1: An 11th-century scroll, Calligraphy: Kufic script, Medium: Block printing, Function: Miniature texts containing prayers and Qur'anic verses to be kept in small amulet boxes. Source: "Historical Talismans from the Muslim World," Folkloristan, July 16, 2022, Date Accessed: March 7, 2026, https://www.folkloristan.com/post/historical-talismans-from-the-muslim-world

Functionality of some Objects used as Talismans

These were used in the following ways shown in Table 1[4].

	Object	Material and Functionality
1	Carved Seals	Early Islamic period in wood carving with motifs and symbols in soft wood
2	Scrolls	Block printed on leaves and paper in Kufic script containing prayers and Qur'anic verses in amulet boxes
3	Metal amulet boxes	Metal boxes with engraved protective verses
4	Pouches	A small pouch-like case in leather engraving, easy to carry, with miniature size Quran
5	Quran *Jaama* or Talismanic shirts	Shirts in cotton or silk, worn under amour, with painted squares and medallions carrying Quranic verses or names of Allah and numerical
6	Stones and Jewelry	Verses carved in precious and semi-precious stones and metal part of the jewelry
7	Swords, daggers and sword cases	Engrave in metal on sword and leather for the cases to be used in battle for protection and success.
8	*Alam* or flag	Embroidery on Fabric and metal engraving on *alams* and *kamsa,* hand of Fatima R.A.
9	Banners	Embroidered and printed with ink on fabric associated with military victory
10	Devotional manual	Book illumination on hand made paper

[2] Sian H., "A History of Talismans & Amulets: Prehistoric to Modern Times," Mythfolks, June 25, 2024, https://www.mythfolks.com/talismans-amulets/history

[3] "Historical Talismans from the Muslim World," Folkloristan, July 16, 2022, https://www.folkloristan.com/post/historical-talismans-from-the-muslim-world

[4] "Historical Talismans from the Muslim World," *Folkloristan*, July 16, 2022, https://www.folkloristan.com/post/historical-talismans-from-the-muslim-world

While these items are classified as *bida'h* or superstition by Islamic orthodox groups and contemporary scientific thinking, they nevertheless emerged out of exclusive knowledge of science, numerology, spirituality and art[5]. Historically, they cannot be confined to the magical or occult arts, rather, they serve as a passage to connect with positive force while urging the faithful to trust and seek refuge in Allah[6].



Figure 2: The anti-plague amuletic design known as the "Garden of Names" (jannat al-asma'), included in a prayer book, Ottoman lands, late 18th century. Topkapı Palace Library, Istanbul, E.H. 1005, folios 20v-21r. Christiane Gruber, "The Arts of Protection and Healing in Islam: Amulets and the Body," *Ajam Media Collective*, April 30, 2021, Date Accessed: March 6, 2026, https://ajammc.com/2021/04/30/amulets-and-the-body/

History of Islamic Calligraphic Textiles, Tiraz

In medieval period, decorating textiles with inscription was a common practice. Lettered garments were considered fashionable and a means to convey important messages and signify a privileged social status. In an era with high illiteracy, a person wearing a garment with a form of writing convinced the public to perceive the person with high intellect and education. These were done in painting or printing in black ink, embroidery, tapestry weaving and brocade. Under the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750) royal workshops and guilds were established for textiles especially for the caliph and court. Inscribed textiles called *tiraz* with Quranic verses in Kufic Script, were created in these workshops which served as historical documentation of the ruler, producer, place and dates. Later, *naskhi* or *thuluth* script was used in a cursive, musical and soft style. In Persian the word *tiraz* means "made with needle"[7]. Tiraz produced in the private factories, *Khassa,* were worn by caliphs or given as robes of honor to courtiers and ambassadors in a *khil'a* or *khil'at* (robe of honor) ceremony, providing a window into the political and religious life of early Islam[8]. 'In the Sufi tradition, the practice to give their own 'patched' robe (*khirqa, frock* and *muraqqa*) to their followers was a symbol of discipleship. Robes of honor were presented in the *durbar* or formal courts, conveying information about rank of a courtier or wealth of the dynasty. Robes were also used for diplomatic purposes that confirmed alliance[9]. Most tiraz were made of linen, wool, cotton, or a fabric called *mulham*, composite of a silk warp and cotton or other weft. Talismanic textiles are a subset of tiraz, while tiraz are robes of honor, the talismanic textiles are shirts with Quranic verses, numbers and symbols for the purpose of protection[10].

Talismanic Shirts

Talismanic shirts were worn from 15th to 19th century in the Safavid, Ottoman, South Asian and West African cultures to protect the wearer through healing and divination by the Scriptures of Quran, *vefk* (numeric squares) abjad (letter) numerals and *Ilm-e-Rujūm / Nujūm.* In South Asia, these shirts appeared between the 15th and 17th centuries, during the Sultanate reign in Delhi, Deccan and

[5] Christiane Gruber, "The Arts of Protection and Healing in Islam: Amulets and the Body," *Ajam Media Collective*, April 30, 2021, https://ajammc.com/2021/04/30/amulets-and-the-body/
[6] Gruber, "Amulets and the Body."
[7] Cäcilia Fluck, "Inscribed Textiles," in *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th–9th Century*, ed. Helen C. Evans and Brandie Ratliff (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 72–85.
[8] Maryam Ekhtiar and Julia Cohen, "Tiraz: Inscribed Textiles from the Early Islamic Period," *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, July 2015, https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/tiraz-inscribed-textiles-from-the-early-islamic-period
[9] Nimira Dewji, "The Khil'at Was Bestowed for Services Rendered," *Ismailimail*, April 14, 2016, https://ismailimail.blog/2016/04/14/the-khilat-was-bestowed-for-services-rendered/
[10] Julia Cohen and Maryam Ekhtiar, "Tiraz: Inscribed Textiles from the Early Islamic Period," *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, July 2015, https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/tiraz-inscribed-textiles-from-the-early-islamic-period

Mughal Empire. Some depicted the holy sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina, schematic designs and motifs, symbols and pilgrimage certificates[11].

Procedure

Talismanic shirts were made of starched cotton to stiffen the fabric for calligraphy. Inks in gold, black and earth tones were used for inscriptions whereas vermilion, red, white lead and lapis lazuli were used for colors in the illumination[12]. The designs and motifs were densely packed into grids with medallions and Quranic script in a lengthy task. The garment was constructed in three portions:

1- Large rectangular piece for the front and chest

2- Large rectangular piece for the back and torso

3- Two smaller pieces for the sleeves

4- Six pointed star, the seal of Solomon

Aim of Study

The aim of the study is to throw light on the significance of wearable textiles with Calligraphy and to trace out the inspiration in contemporary fashion in Pakistan. The objectives for the research are as follows:

- An analysis on visual literature review
- Shift from Sacred Function to Consumable Commercial Product
- Finding creative solutions for printed designs with Arabic calligraphy

Literature Review

In an online series on arts associated with protection and healing in Islam, Professor Christiane Gruber from History of Art Department at the University of Michigan discusses a shirt made in South Asia, India c.1450-1550 CE on cotton fabric with the complete Quran in rectangular panels covering the entire shirt. The verses are written in ink functioning as a protective cloak. The borders have names of Allah serving as a *tasbeeh* for the wearer and the full coverage of the garment with text seems like a fabric book bound together.



Figure 4 and b (detail view): A talismanic shirt made of cotton and inscribed with the entirety of the Qur'an, India, 15th or 16th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, 1998. Christiane Gruber, "The Arts of Protection and Healing in Islam: Talismanic Shirts as Premodern 'PPE'," *Ajam Media Collective*, April 30, 2021, Date Accessed: March 7, 2026, https://ajammc.com/2021/04/30/premodern-ppe-talismanic-shirts/

[11] Shivani Kasumra, "How Talismanic Shirts Combined War and Literature," *MAP Academy*, accessed March 7, 2026, https://mapacademy.io/how-talismanic-shirts-combined-war-and-literature/

[12] Shivani Kasumra, "How Talismanic Shirts Combined War and Literature," *MAP Academy*, accessed March 7, 2026, https://mapacademy.io/how-talismanic-shirts-combined-war-and-literature/

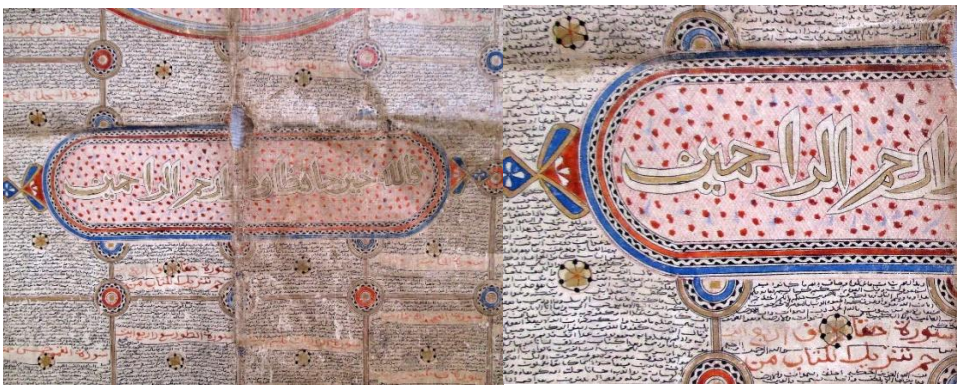


Figure 5 and 6(detail view): Back of the Talismanic shirt, India, 15th or 16th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, 1998. Christiane Gruber, "The Arts of Protection and Healing in Islam: Talismanic Shirts as Premodern 'PPE'," *Ajam Media Collective*, April 30, 2021, Date Accessed: March 7, 2026, https://ajammc.com/2021/04/30/premodern-ppe-talismanic-shirts/

The inscription on the back states "God is the Best Guardian and the Most Merciful of the Merciful Ones" (12:64) Quran, **Surah Yusuf (Figure no. 5 and 6). The decorative borders are illuminated in gold, red and blue color. The layout of the design on this shirt resembles the metal or leather plates of an armor, connected by alternating blue, dark orange, and gold circles. A small rosette encircling a gold diamond is placed at the center of each panel with verses in *Bihari* Quran manuscripts. Two chest medallions each on one chest in blue and vermillion tones stands out as a contrasting color change from the beige and earthy tones in the background, each inscribed with the shahada resembling protective breastplates. The interesting element in this shirt is the lobed panels at the lower front and back with angular edges like daggers, resembling armor flaps[13]. The author writes that due to the usage of washable inks that were damaged by water or body sweat, many areas of the shirts have been damaged by wear and tear.**

A YouTube documentary titled "The Shirt designed to keep its Wearer Alive" discusses a 16th to 17th century Ottoman Talismanic shirt. It is currently housed in the Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul, Turkey. An interesting feature of this shirt is an architectural reference at the back side which resembles a large doorway[14]. Another video titled "Talismanic Shirts of the Ottoman Sultans" discusses the artefacts displayed at the Imperial Clothing Gallery at Topkapi Palace Museum. It houses Cem Sultan shirts which took three years in making (1477-80) carries astrological images of stars in the best positions and moments favorable for the wearer[15].

Talismanic shirt displayed at FBQ Museum, Qatar has been sewn from cream-colored cotton with blue and red ink with liquidized gold. The interesting element of its sewing cut is that it has an open front like a *kaftan*. The Qur'anic verses include the Surat al-Fatiha, Ayat al-Kursi, the Surat Yasin, and the verse "Help from God and a speedy victory" from Surat al-Saff in *naskh* and *ruqqa* calligraphic script. The squares emphasize Mohammed and Allah in *kufic* script. It also has names of the first four caliphs and ninety-nine names of Allah composed with amulet signs with numbers based on *ilm al huruf*[16].

An interesting shirt in the Khalili collection (Figure no. 7a and b) from Mughal era dated 16th or early 17th century, in the Indian sub-continent portrays the place of pilgrimage situated in Mecca, The Holy *Kaaba*. It belongs to *Hajj and the Arts of Pilgrimage*, a collection of 27 essays by the scholar Professor Sir Nasser David Khalili. The collection has more than five thousand objects relating

[13] Nader Sayadi, "Encounters," in *Encounters: Medieval Islamic History in 50 Objects*, ed. Marcus Milwright (2026), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003413240-49

[14] *The Shirt Designed to Keep its Wearer Alive*, YouTube video, 10:59, posted by *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, May 3, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Auw40aoOS14

[15] *"Talismanic Shirts of Ottoman Sultans,"* YouTube video, 6:39, posted by *Tefekkür Hazinem*, Accessed March 7, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqQtWR5ckOE

[16] Sarah Schroeder, "Talismanic Shirt," *Explore Islamic Art Collections*, Museum With No Frontiers, Accessed March 8, 2026, https://islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=object;EPM;qt;Mus22;45;en

to the arts of pilgrimage, including this talismanic shirt under discussion[17]. The *Kaaba/Qibla* is the most sacred Muslim place of worship in the shape of a cube covered with a black fabric. It has been made on the left panel of the shirt exactly near the heart in a quest to express the devotion of the wearer to it.



Figure 7 a and b (detail view): Talismanic Shirt with Depictions of the Two Holy Sanctuaries, Mughal India or the Deccan, 16th or early 17th century, Materials: ink, colored pigments and gold on cotton, Dimensions: 69 x 90cm, Accession Number: TXT 471, Khalili Collections, Accessed March 8, 2026, https://www.khalilicollections.org/collections/hajj-and-the-arts-of-pilgrimage/khalili-collection-hajj-and-the-arts-of-pilgrimage-talismanic-shirt-with-depictions-of-the-two-holy-sanctuaries-txt471/

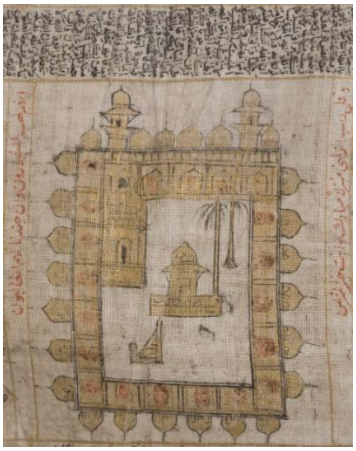


Figure 8: Detail view of *Masjid-e-Nabawi* situated in Medina, Saudi Arab.

On the other side of the shirt is Masjid-e-Nabawi (Figure no. 8), the mosque of the holy Prophet Muhammad (SAWW) built in 622 CE after the migration (*Hijrah*) from Mecca to Medina. The shirt was produced in the Indian subcontinent as the architectural forms resemble the Mughal-era monuments of northern India, for example; *chattrī* or small onion-shaped dome crowning the minarets[18]. The back of the shirt has a central circle and 12 small circles arranged around it symbolizing the macrocosmic dimensions of the prayer through the twelve spheres in zodiacal orbit around the sunburst. It was believed that the letters and numerals could manifest a connection between the twelve constellations and the body's twelve openings[19].

[17] "Talismanic Shirt with Depictions of the Two Holy Sanctuaries," *Khalili Collections*, Accessed March 8, 2026, https://www.khalilicollections.org/collections/hajj-and-the-arts-of-pilgrimage/khalili-collection-hajj-and-the-arts-of-pilgrimage-talismanic-shirt-with-depictions-of-the-two-holy-sanctuaries-txt471/

[18] Saarthak Singh, "A Talismanic Tunic with Images of Mecca & Medina: Pilgrimage, Place and the Body in the Mughal and Ottoman Empires," in *16th International Congress of Turkish Art. October 3–5, 2019, Ankara: Proceedings*, vol. 3 (Istanbul: TC Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2023).

[19] Singh, "A Talismanic Tunic with Images of Mecca & Medina."



Figure 9a and b (detail view): Talismanic Shirt Ottoman, H. Muharrem 1, 990 (C.E. January 26, 1582). Cotton, ink gold leaf, paint/dye. Belonged to Sultan Murad III, Sof'ia Dolgorukaia, "Topkapi Palace: The Sultan Costume Collection Exhibit," The Oak, November 27, 2023, https://oak.atlantia.sca.org/topkapi-palace-the-sultan-costume-collection-exhibit/

The collection of Topkapi Palace Museum houses many talismanic shirts belonging to the family and royal court of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, who ruled the Ottoman Empire from 1520-66. A shirt in the collection that belongs to Sultan Murad III has panels of script and numeric grid in golden panels across the shirt. It has a very simple design with no other motif ornamentation (Figure no. 9a and b). Another shirt that belongs to Selim, the son of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, is fully covered with amulet grids which forms a peculiar pattern across the surface. Two circles in black ink are on the chest, one on each side with six pointed stars further carrying inscriptions and numerals[20] (Figure no. 10a and b).

The medium is ink, dye and gold leaf on cotton (Figure no. 13). The base fabric is mostly cream or off-white in color. A beautiful specimen with mix gold and silver leaf has a less intricate layout with bold partitions by outlined areas in golden color and inscriptions inside them composed in tones of red, pink, blue and green. The inscriptions on silver leaf gives a darker grey tone on the silver shimmer in the back ground. The shirt is shorter in length then the other pieces on display and has half sleeves[21]. In the book "Encounters: Medieval Islamic History in 50 Objects" by Nader Sayadi, another important function of the Talismanic shirt has been discussed. In Islamic traditions. The martyrs in a battle filed were buried without funerary ablution due to less water resources at a time when hundreds of bodies were to be buried. Inscribed with the Quranic verses, the white colored Talismanic shirts served as a *kafan* (burial shrouds) enveloping the wearers in sacred scripture for a spiritually meaningful burial[22].



Figure 10 and 11 (detail view): Talismanic Shirt Ottoman, H. 972 (C.E. 1564-1565). Cotton and silk blend, ink, gold leaf. Belonged to Suleyman the Magnificent's son Selim, Topkapi Palace: The Sultan Costume Collection, https://oak.atlantia.sca.org/topkapi-palace-the-sultan-costume-collection-exhibit/

[20] Sof'ia Dolgorukaia, "Topkapi Palace: The Sultan Costume Collection Exhibit," *The Oak*, November 27, 2023, https://oak.atlantia.sca.org/topkapi-palace-the-sultan-costume-collection-exhibit/
[21] Sof'ia Dolgorukaia, "Topkapi Palace: The Sultan Costume Collection Exhibit," *The Oak*, November 27, 2023, https://oak.atlantia.sca.org/topkapi-palace-the-sultan-costume-collection-exhibit/
[22] Nader Sayadi, "Encounters," in *Encounters: Medieval Islamic History in 50 Objects*, ed. Marcus Milwright, Accessed March 9, 2026, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003413240-49

Figure 12 (right most): Detail of inscription, Talismanic Shirt Ottoman, H. Muharrem 1, 990 (C.E. January 26, 1582). Cotton, ink gold leaf, paint/dye. Belonged to Sultan Murad III, Sof'ia Dolgorukaia, "Topkapi Palace: The Sultan Costume Collection Exhibit," The Oak, November 27, 2023, https://oak.atlantia.sca.org/topkapi-palace-the-sultan-costume-collection-exhibit/



Figure 13a: Talismanic Shirt, Ottoman 16th century, cotton, ink, gold and silver leaf, paint and dye, Accessed March 8, 2026, https://sites.google.com/view/sofiadolgorukaia/visual-research/topkapi-palace-museum/topkapi-palace-clothing

Figure 13b: Detail view of the Ghubari script in black ink on white surface in between colored motif areas outlined with golden borders each carrying a verse and enclosing phrases for victory. Talismanic Shirt, Ottoman 16th century, cotton, ink, gold and silver leaf, paint and dye, Accessed March 8, 2026, https://sites.google.com/view/sofiadolgorukaia/visual-research/topkapi-palace-museum/topkapi-palace-clothing

The article titled "Talismanic Shirts (Jama'ah al Tawiz)" by Shahana Mahdi throws light on an elaborate use of the talismanic shirts stating that not only men but women and children also wore them. The shirts with Quranic scriptures provided spiritual strength, protection from diseases, famine, healing in difficulties in child birth, sudden death and the difficulties of travel, armor during battle and for ceremonial purposes[23].



Figure 14: Talismanic shirt (Jama), India early 20th century, bearing the complete Quran manuscript, written in black *Ghubari* script with intricate lattice pattern ,sold at an Auction house, Shahana Mahdi, "Talismanic Shirts (Jama'ah al-Tawiz)," Museum of Passion, July 27, 2024, Accessed March 9, 2026, https://museumofpassion.wordpress.com/2024/07/27/talismanic-shirts-jam-aah-al-tawiz-2/

The article discusses the depiction of motif that has been constructed by the geometric symbols squares, numeric grids, medallions, circular patterns, cypress and cloud shaped sections. Each section has been distinguished by systematically design color scheme[24].

[23] Shahana Mahdi, "Talismanic Shirts (Jama'ah al-Tawiz)," *Museum of Passion*, July 27, 2024, https://museumofpassion.wordpress.com/2024/07/27/talismanic-shirts-jam-aah-al-tawiz-2/

[24] Shahana Mahdi, "Talismanic Shirts (Jama'ah al-Tawiz)," *Museum of Passion*, July 27, 2024, https://museumofpassion.wordpress.com/2024/07/27/talismanic-shirts-jam-aah-al-tawiz-2/

The Qur'anic texts are often framed with intricate floral and geometric motifs inspired by nature as a symbolic representation of the unity of Allah in everything.[25]

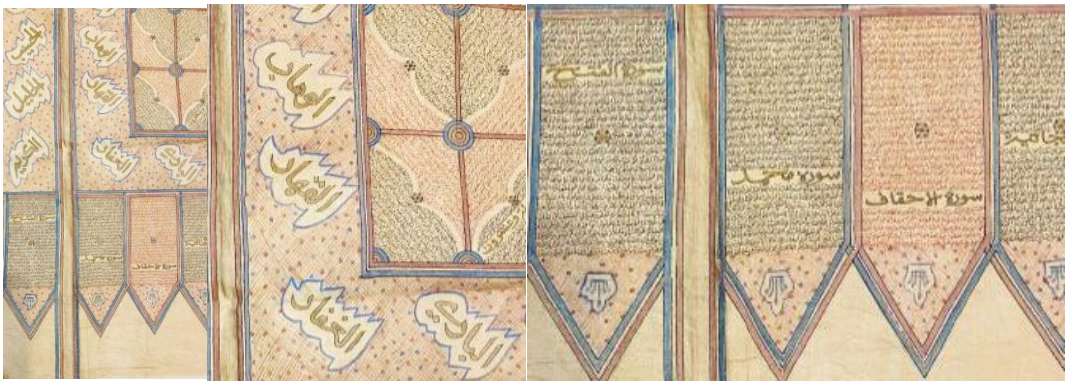


Figure 15a, b and c: Detail view of border with Quranic surah, central panel with names of Allah in cloud motifs and verses of the Holy Quran set in horizontal panels of zigzag layout, https://museumofpassion.wordpress.com/2024/07/27/talismanic-shirts-jam-aah-al-tawiz-2/

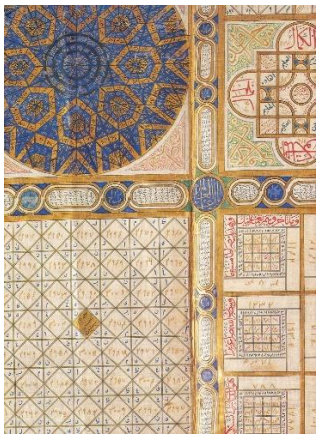


Figure 16: A design was a complete dictionary of numerological charms with letters (huruf) and numbers (abjad), astrological signs, zodiac symbols and magical squares/grids (waqf al-a'dad), names of Allah and Quranic verses all packed in one composition, Accessed March 9, 2026 https://museumofpassion.wordpress.com/2024/07/27/talismanic-shirts-jamaah-al-tawiz-2/

A research paper titled "The Hero Dons a Talismanic Shirt for Battle: Magical Objects Aiding the Warrior in a Turkish Epic Romance" written by Helga Anetshofer at the University of Chicago states that till date only 100 talismanic shirts are preserved in museum and private collections around the world[26]. A major reason for such a less number of surviving shirts is that most of them must have been torn or destroyed during battles. These were not scholarly discusses until 1856 by an Austrian Orientalist Joseph von Hammer. Later publications were made in 1994 and 1997 from the private *Khalili* collection. In 2002, the Ottoman shirts from the Topkapı Palace Museum were displayed at the exhibition "The Healing Shirts (Şifalı Gömlekler) of the Sultans," for the first time

[25] "*Symbolism in Islamic Art: An Analysis of Ornamentation and Arabic Calligraphy*," *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* 1, no. 1 (2024): n.pag., accessed March 9, 2026, https://e-journal.citakonsultindo.or.id/index.php/IJESB/article/view/1696

[26] Helga Anetshofer, "The Hero Dons a Talismanic Shirt for Battle: Magical Objects Aiding the Warrior in a Turkish Epic Romance," Journal of Near Eastern Studies 77, no. 2 (2018): 175–193, https://www.academia.edu/37512016/The_Hero_Dons_a_Talismanic_Shirt_for_Battle_Magic_Objects_Aiding_the_Warrior_in_a_Turkish_Epic_Romance_Journal_of_Near_Eastern_Studies_vol_77_no_2_2018_175_193

for public. This was part of the 38th International Congress on the History of Medicine in Istanbul[27]. Despite these existing artifacts, there is no known mention of talismanic shirts in the literature. The article discusses a peculiar example of a talismanic shirts cataloged in Bāyezīd's II library inventory from 909/1502–1503 made from amniotic membrane of a human uterus which has the fetus, unlike others made of silk, cotton and pure linen. It has magic squares and prayers on it like the other examples discussed earlier. In the Eastern and Western cultures strong magical properties are attributed to this membrane[28].

In 16th International Congress of Turkish Art (2019), a research paper titled "A Talismanic Tunic with Images of Mecca & Medina: Pilgrimage, Place and the Body in the Mughal and Ottoman Empires" by Saarthak Singh from New York University, proposes a reason for less documented South Asian and Safavid Talismanic shirts in contrast to Ottoman talismanic shirts. The Museum of Topkapi Palace has almost 85 specimens of Ottoman era, preserved with detail and history. Whereas those from Safavid Iran and Mughal India are not yet well studied or documented because they are dispersed across private and public collections and are treated as a separate category from calligraphy and textiles[29].



Figure 17a and b (detail view): Victory shirt or battle shirt worn by Dirilis Erutugul Gazi during his expeditions and wars, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (United Kingdom) Victoria and Albert Museum, Accessed March 9, 2026, https://museumofpassion.wordpress.com/2024/07/27/talismanic-shirts-jamaah-al-tawiz-2/

This Talismanic shirt (Figure no. 17) he been attributed to Erutugul Gazi, the legendary leader of the *Kayı* tribe of the Oghuz Turks and father of Osman I, founder of the Ottoman Empire in the 13th century during the Seljuk Sultanate period. It has a unique peach colored base fabric with motifs in red, blue and gold. The border on the hem of the shirt has a stylized floral motif[30]. The interesting element is the depiction of two crescents mirrored on each side of the chest along with six pointed star (the seal of Solomon). Crescent symbolizes the renewal of time and continual growth. In Islam it is believed that Solomon (Prophet Sulayman) was blessed with wisdom, authority over spirits (*jin*), and command over the natural world, worn to invoke cosmic protection. The star is often paired with the crescent, symbolizing the beginning and the end. There are two cypresses on each side mirrored in the same way. The cypress is an evergreen tree symbolically representing eternal life to protect the wearer in battle field. Geometric patterns combined with floral motifs represent an eternal cosmic harmony[31].

combined with floral motifs represent an eternal cosmic harmony[32].

[27] Helga Anetshofer, "The Hero Dons a Talismanic Shirt for Battle," 178.
[28] Helga Anetshofer, "The Hero Dons a Talismanic Shirt for Battle," 189.
[29] Saarthak Singh, "A Talismanic Tunic with Images of Mecca & Medina: Pilgrimage, Place and the Body in the Mughal and Ottoman Empires," in *16th International Congress of Turkish Art. October 3–5, 2019, Ankara: Proceedings*, vol. 3 (Istanbul: TC Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2023).
[30] Ertugrul English Subtitled (Facebook page), "Battle shirt of Ertugrul Gazi R- its Osmanli tradition/the history of blessed shir…," Facebook post, March ? 2026, accessed March 9, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/ErtugrulEnglishSubtitled/posts/738405696364937/.
[31] "*Symbolism in Islamic Art: An Analysis of Ornamentation and Arabic Calligraphy*," *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* 1, no. 1 (2024): n.pag., accessed March 9, 2026, https://e-journal.citakonsultindo.or.id/index.php/IJESB/article/view/1696/14626
[32] "*Symbolism in Islamic Art: An Analysis of Ornamentation and Arabic Calligraphy*," *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business* 1, no. 1 (2024): n.pag., accessed March 9, 2026, https://e-journal.citakonsultindo.or.id/index.php/IJESB/article/view/1696/14626



Figure 18a and b (detail): Talismanic shirt, Sultan Mahmet, Istanbul, Turkey, Holding Museum: Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Date of Object: c.15th century, Museum Inventory Number: 539, Material(s) / Technique(s): Yellow dyed silk, Dimensions: Length 100 cm, chest (from cuff of sleeve to cuff of sleeve) 120 cm, Period / Dynasty: Early Ottoman period, Provenance: Bursa, Turkey, https://islamicart.museumwnf.org/database_item.php?id=object;isl;tr;muso1;18;en&cp



Figure 19a and b (detail view): Middle East, Textile. Talismanic shirt, painted cotton, densely inscribed in Arabic with religious phrases and Quran quotations set in cartouches and grids, Iran, 1750-1900, Length: 74.9cm (From register) Width across the shoulders width: 91.4cm (From register) Woven cotton, ink, bronze and colours, Museum no. T.8-1945, Gift of Mrs. Walter, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O364510/shirt/

Some Talismanic shirts have beautiful botanical motifs symbolizing the gardens of paradise in a compostion with calligraphy. The motif in this shirt (Figure no. 19) resembles the fresoces on the Islamic architecture of the sam etime period. The border runs through the sides and te hem of the shirt. An article titled “A Warrior’s Magic Shirt” by Avalon Fotheringham discusses the similarities in the motifs of the book illuminations and talismanic shirts of the same time period. It discusses the example of page from a 15th-century Sultanate Quran with the word “Allah”, with the same motif (circled in yellow) resembling the word ‘Allah’ written in Arabic that is also present on the borders of the talismanic shirt. India, 15th century, Khalili collection, Museum no T.59-1935, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 20: Emna Esseghir, "Sacred Threads: The Spiritual and Artistic Essence of Islamic Talismanic Shirts," *Museum Volunteers, JMM*, February 26, 2024, https://museumvolunteersjmm.com/2024/02/26/sacred-threads-the-spiritual-and-artistic-essence-of-islamic-talismanic-shirts/



Figure 21: "An Islamic Ottoman Talismanic Shirt," Oriental Art Auctions, accessed March 10, 2026, https://www.orientalartauctions.com/object/artisla47916-an-islamic-ottoman-talismanic-shirt

A shirt (jama) covered with text written in *Naskh* scripts with symbols and script packed in cypress tree forms includes verses from the Holy Qur'an, Names of Allah and prayers in colors of black, red, green, and gold. A beautiful eight petal flower is in the center, below the neckline, packed with scriptures from the Quran.



Figure 22: beck view of the shirt, "An Islamic Ottoman Talismanic Shirt," Oriental Art Auctions, accessed March 10, 2026, https://www.orientalartauctions.com/object/artisla47916-an-islamic-ottoman-talismanic-shirt



Figure 23: An Ottoman Talismanic shirt, 18th century, Reference: art3002406, Height 101 cm,

Width 123 cm, "An Ottoman Talismanic Shirt, 18th Century," Oriental Art Auctions, accessed March 11, 2026, https://www.orientalartauctions.com/object/art3002406-an-ottoman-talismanic-shirt-18th-century

The article titled "Sacred Threads: the Spiritual and Artistic Essence of Islamic Talismanic Shirts" by Emna Esseghir discusses an Ottoman Talismanic shirt with three kinds of calligraphic script composed on the same surface: *naskh, thuluth* and *Kufic* scripts.

The shirt is a composition of panels, circles, squares and cartouches along with triangular cypress tree forms. The patterns are in different sizes and shapes, mirrored in colors of black, red, blue, and gold[33].

Methodology

This is a descriptive study documenting the Talismanic shirts with Calligraphy from internet sources, museum such as Topkapı Palace Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, private collections and catalogues and library research. As there is scarce information of the subject in books therefore private blogs and online collections have been researched. The study relates the historic use of Arabic calligraphy with the contemporary fashion trends in Pakistan by analyzing the leading Pakistani Textile brands and their products through online fashion catalogues and store visits in the city of Lahore, Pakistan.

Discussion

As discussed earlier, the historic use of Talismanic shirts with Quranic script and calligraphy on wearable textiles was not an ordinary clothing, rather it was considered sacred and had spiritual powers in order to protect the wearer against war, illness and calamity. The calligraphers were commissioned by rulers, elite warriors and family members of the sultan. These shirts were specially designed for each individual according to the position of their astrological stars.

Factors for Downfall in the Use of Calligraphy on Apparel Textiles

In today's fashion the basic reasons for its downfall is:

- Sacred text cannot be printed or embroidered on dirty or impure clothes
- Textiles with Quranic inscription cannot be worn at inappropriate places
- Quranic verses cannot be treated as decorative or commercial commodity
- Some Islamic scholars debate on the legitimacy of wearing Quranic text as *bidʿah* (religious innovation)
- Calligraphy has been confined to architecture, book illumination manuscripts and painting
- Instead of clothing, sacred calligraphy is now used in contexts that preserve its dignity
- The effects of Post-colonial westernization has contributed in downfall of the skill of manual calligraphy, industrialization has led to mass production and computer aided designs resulting in a loss in the essence of the craft.

Rejection of Calligraphic Apparels by the Pakistani Society

An unfortunate incident happened in Lahore (2024) when an angry mob in Pakistan accused a woman with blasphemy for wearing a dress with Arabic calligraphy of the word *halwat* meaning "beautiful life" mistaking it for Quran verses[34][35]. The woman was rescued by a police team which had handled similar incidents in the past. Later, the parliament expressed deep concern over the growing intolerance in the country and ignorance of the nation towards languages and their application. Ironically, the kurta the young woman was harassed for belonged to a brand based in Kuwait[36]. It was stressed that a Muslim must be able to identify between a Quranic verse and a simple Arabic word, furthermore false allegations and misuse of blasphemy laws is a serious issue that needs to be addressed[37].

[33] "An Ottoman Talismanic Shirt, 18th Century," *Oriental Art Auctions*, accessed March 11, 2026, https://www.orientalartauctions.com/object/art3002406-an-ottoman-talismanic-shirt-18th-century
[34] Caroline Davies, "Pakistan Woman in Arabic Script Dress Saved from Mob Claiming Blasphemy," *BBC News*, February 26, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-68399822
[35] Asif Chaudhry, "Girl in Arabic Print Shirt Saved from Mob by Lahore Police," *Dawn*, February 26, 2024, https://www.dawn.com/news/1817188
[36] "Our Correspondent, "Senate Echoes with Lahore Mob Trying to Attack Woman," *The Express Tribune*, February 28, 2024, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2457857/senate-echoes-with-lahore-mob-trying-to-attack-woman
[37] Our Correspondent, "Senate Echoes with Lahore Mob Trying to Attack Woman."



Figure 24: Dialogue Pakistan, 'Kuwaiti Clothing Brand Issues Clarification after Arabic Calligraphy Dress Design Sparks Controversy,' February 26, 2024, https://dialoguepakistan.com/en/pakistan/kuwaiti-clothing-brand-issues-clarification-after-arabic-calligraphy-dress-design-sparks-controversy.

Steps to promote Apparel Textiles with non-religious Calligraphy in Pakistan

Calligraphy done manually is a meditative, satisfying and a deliberate process that connects the artist with a rich cultural heritage. Every piece is thus unique and hard to be copied or remade. On the other hand, computer aided calligraphy lacks the warmth and soul of hand-drawn letters and can be replicated multiple times hence cannot be considered as a unique crafted piece.

Hence in order to make a bridge between the traditional crafts and the upcoming generation, it is recommended that the art of calligraphy must be taken forward keeping following perspectives:

- The Arabic calligraphic script in wearable textiles should not be Quranic or religious in order to maintain the sanctity of the scriptures
- The wearable textiles should be allowed to use the Arabic, Urdu or Persian letters as Calligraphic motifs in order to keep the languages alive and pass them onto the upcoming generations as an art form rather than a dead language.
- To maintain the culture and tradition, the calligraphic scriptures on the contemporary apparel textiles can be taken from poetry, folk stories and quotations (non-religious) in an urge to document them as motifs on the textiles
- These scriptures will not be considered as *bid'ah* or *shirk* because they have got nothing to do with the astrological positioning of the stars, religious ritual or faith related concerns of the wearer.



Figure: 25a: Black and white shawl, "Shawls Collection," Rang O Noor by Ahmad, accessed March 13, 2026, https://rangonoorbyahmad.com/collections/shawls

Figure 25b: Blue and white silk shawl, "Lawn Calligraphy Dupatta | Shawl," *HamariWeb Shop*, accessed March 13, 2026, https://shop.hamariweb.com/lawn-calligraphy-dupatta-shawl-mpid723807

Figure 25c: Purple silk scarf, "Digital Calligraphy Scarfs," The Taanka Emporium by LNY, accessed March 13, 2026, https://thetaanka.org.pk/digital-calligraphy-scarfs/

Designs with calligraphic letters in a meaningless manner are being used as motif element and have been appearing in the market on silk scarfs, *dupattas*, *kurtas, kameez* (shirts) in digital printing.

Contemporary Pakistani Textile Brands Promoting non-religious Calligraphy in Apparel Textiles



Figure 26 (a.b and c) Scarf, Sufi Tales Shop, accessed March 13, 2026, https://www.sufitales.com/products/black-red-calligraphy-scarf

Various kinds of fabrics and textile embellishment and printing techniques have been explored in the making of these scarfs, such as silk base with digital print, velvet base with applique patches of *huruf,* Cotton net or organza with embroidery and patchwork and hand screen or block prints.



Figure 27: "Trending Silk Calligraphy Collections in Pakistan," TNGMD Store Blog, accessed March 12, 2026, https://www.tngmdstore.com/blogs/news/trending-silk-calligraphy-collections-in-pakistan

Poetry Inscribed on Apparel Textiles as a Tribute

A trend making place in the market is apparel *shawls* and *kurtas* with calligraphic script in *Urdu* language from famous poets and philosophers like Allama Iqbal, Jaun Elia or Mirza Ghalib.



Figure 28a: Blue shirt: "Ghalib Ki Khuwaish Stole (Blue)," Material: Swiss Lawn

100% Polyster Fabric, Dimension: Length : 73"/74" Width : 14"/15", *Wear Ghalib*, accessed March 13, 2026, https://www.wearghalib.com/products/ghalib-ki-khuwaish-stole-blue

Figure 28b: Teal Blue silk Stoler "Iqbal Ka Andaaz Stole," Fabric Material: Polly Lawn, Dimensions: 28/29 width * 73/74 length (inches), Wear Ghalib, accessed March 13, 2026, https://www.wearghalib.com/products/iqbal-ka-andaaz-stole

All-over square layout with Writings in Urdu

Some designs have a layout that resembles the all over set layouts of the Talismanic shirts with calligraphy packed in small squares across the fabric.



Figure 29a (left): Talismanic Script in box layout: Talismanic Shirt Inscribed with Pages from the Koran, Late 17th Century, Science Museum Group Collection, accessed March 13, 2026, https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co102668/talismanic-shirt-inscribed-with-pages-from-the-koran-late-17th-century

Figure 29b (right): *Jugnu* print in three color options "Jugnu Kurta Antique Maroon," Shop Manto, accessed March 13, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/products/jugnu-kurta-antique-maroon

Over-All Layout in Panels of Motifs and Calligraphy

A beautiful style of composing calligraphy boxes and panels with motifs and designs in an over-all layout can be seen in Talismanic shirts that has inspired the layout of today's apparels with non-religious texts packed in areas of design bordered with motifs across the surface of the shirt. In the example discussed below, the shirt by the Pakistani brand has been printed in long length in an A-Line Kurta style, made from lawn fabric. It Features words of Allama Iqbal composed with panels of motifs in

soothing tones of blue and brown. Interestingly the same family of colors has can be seen in the Ottoman Talismanic shirt belonging to the 18th century.



Figure 30 a (left): An Ottoman Talismanic shirt front and back, 18th century, Reference: art3002406, Height 101 cm, Width 123 cm, "An Ottoman Talismanic Shirt, 18th Century," Oriental Art Auctions, accessed March 11, 2026, https://www.orientalartauctions.com/object/art3002406-an-ottoman-talismanic-shirt-18th-century

Figure 30b (Middle and right): "*Gul-e-Jahaan Kurta*, Blue," Shop Manto, accessed March 13, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/products/gul-e-jahaan-kurta-blue

Composition with One Meaningful Urdu word in Repetition

A layout very popular in the market today is a pattern with one meaningful word that conveys a strong message socially. If such kind of print is customized, the wearer can suggest the word that is really intimate to him or her. The shirt carries words like *yaqeen* (Firm Belief), *justuju* (search) and *khushi* (Happiness).



Figure 31: "Eid-e-Bahaar Collection," *Manto*, accessed March 13, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/eid-e-bahaar-collection

Figure 32: "Naseeb Long Shirt," Manto, accessed March 14, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/new-arrivals-women/products/naseeb-long-shirt

The words are packed in tightly compact design compositions where the design dominates to the extent that the words almost merge in them from distance. The example below is a long shirt titled "Naseeb" meaning fate, crafted from jacquard fabric and calligraphy from the poetry of Natiq Lakhnavi. A similar style of blending the script in motifs can be seen in the above mentioned Talismanic shirt in the *Ghubari* script which has a visual quality of merging with the design at a certain distance.



Figure 33: Detail view of verses of the Holy Quran set in horizontal panels of zigzag layout, Talismanic shirt (Jama), India early 20th century, bearing the complete Quran manuscript, written in black *Ghubari* script with intricate lattice pattern ,sold at an Auction house, Shahana Mahdi, "Talismanic Shirts (Jama'ah al-Tawiz)," Museum of Passion, July 27, 2024, Accessed March 9, 2026, https://museumofpassion.wordpress.com/2024/07/27/talismanic-shirts-jam-aah-al-tawiz-2/

Men's Jackets and Shirts in Square Layout

The Jackets and outer wear shirts for men have designs inspired by the square shaped layouts of Talismanic shirts. The shirts have compositions divided in squares of various sizes either overlapping or in a symmetry, packed with motifs and inscriptions. The motifs dominate the inscription due to the use of vibrant colors. These are rather more colorful then those which carry inscriptions as the major element.



Figure 34a (left): "Jackets & Overshirts," Manto, accessed March 14, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/jackets-overshirts

Figure 34b (right): Talismanic shirt, Mahan Doğrusöz, "Talismanic Shirts of the Sultans," *Eternal City Istanbul*, accessed March 14, 2026, https://eternalcityistanbul.com/talismanic-shirts-of-the-sultans/

Horizontally Composed Layouts across shoulders

Another popular composition that resembles the Talismanic shirts is the division of shirts in two sections. The upper portions near the neckline and shoulders have inscriptions written horizontally across the shoulder-line, the lower portion of the shirt has landscape with foliage, architecture or trees.



Figure 35a (left): Mahan Doğrusöz, "Talismanic Shirts of the Sultans," *Eternal City Istanbul*, accessed March 14, 2026, https://eternalcityistanbul.com/talismanic-shirts-of-the-sultans/

Figure 35b (right): "*Bagh-e-Mughal* Overshirt – Brown & Green," features Urdu calligraphy of poetry by Haider Ali Aatish, Manto, accessed March 14, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/jackets-overshirts/products/bagh-e-mughal-overshirt-brown-green

Mirrored Flora and Fauna with Calligraphy on Waist Band

The inclusion of patterns and vegetal motifs in mirrored forms and panels of lotus, blossoms, cypress tree, flowers and vines changed the over-all look of the Talismanic shirt with beautiful flora and fauna composed with the script. The composition has vertical panels of motifs on the front running down with the neckline on the chest. A horizontal band of calligraphy runs across the waist. The layout of the men's waistcoat by a popular fashion brand in Pakistan has the similar style. Poetic verses of poets from Lucknow, pre-partition India, Behzad Lucknavi, Natiq Lakhnavi and Haider Ali Aatish has been documented on many contemporary designs. These textiles are a compilation of legendry poets and their poetry for the upcoming generations.



Figure 36a (left): Manto, "Sikandar Vasket," The Sikandar Vasket made from Raw Silk, features the words of Behzad Lucknavi. Shop Manto, accessed March 14, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/eid-festive-wear/products/sikandar-vasket

Figure 36b (right): Indian Talismanic Shirt (Jama) With Qur'anic Verses and Shia *dua-e-Jawshan Al-kabeer*, North India or the Deccan, 17th-18th Century, Heigth: 72 cm., Width: 99.5 cm. Kent Antiques, "Rare and Important Indian Talismanic Shirt (Jama) With Qur'anic Verses and the Jawshan al-Kabeer" Kent Antiques, accessed March 9, 2026, https://www.kentantiques.com/portfolio/important-indian-talismanic-shirt/

Composition balanced in Inscription and Plain areas

A unique style of Talismanic shirt has an area designated for calligraphy on the yoke of the shirt whereas the flare is left plain. As the calligraphy in these shirts contained Quranic verses, it was appropriate to place them on the higher portion of the shirt rather than then lower rim.   

Figure 37a (left): Khalili Collections, "Coat with Talismanic Inscriptions (TXT 230)," accessed March 15, 2026, https://www.khalilicollections.org/collections/islamic-art/coat-with-talismanic-inscriptions-txt-230/

Figure 37b (right): "Intifada'a Kurta," accessed March 15, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/manto-kurtas/products/intifadaa-kurta

A composition style in similar colors can be seen but with an interesting flip in the design area, the yoke has been kept plain and the design with Urdu calligraphy of poetry by Jigar Moradabadi is placed on the lower part of the apparel garment in the panels as seen in Talismanic shirt. The color palette can be seen in many examples as shown in figures below.

Figure 38a (left): Printed Swiss lawn, Urdu calligraphy of poetry by Jigar Moradabadi, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/scarves-stoles-odhnis/products/gulraiz-dupatta-rust

Figure 38b (right): Khalili Collections, "Coat with Talismanic Inscriptions (TXT 230)," accessed March 15, 2026, https://www.khalilicollections.org/collections/islamic-art/coat-with-talismanic-inscriptions-txt-230/

Calligraphy placed in Vertical Lines

A beautiful style of placing the calligraphy in vertical lines running down the garment is seen in the Talismanic shirts repeatedly. Similar compositions of poetic verses composed on Apparels in contemporary Pakistani Textile industry are appearing in the market.



Figure 39: Detail view of Yoke, Khalili Collections, "Coat with Talismanic Inscriptions (TXT 230)," accessed March 15, 2026, https://www.khalilicollections.org/collections/islamic-art/coat-with-talismanic-inscriptions-txt-230/



Figure 40a (left): "Zareen", Charmeuse silk featuring beautiful hand embellishment & Urdu calligraphy of poetry by Saghar Nizami, accessed March 15, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/eid-festive-wear/products/zareena-set-gold?variant=41595569176638

Figure 40b (right): "Gulistan" Stripes Kurta, printed lawn with poetry of Allama Iqbal, accessed March 15, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/best-sellers-women/products/gulistan-stripes-kurta-brick-red-1?variant=41993635561534

Calligraphy with Botanical Motifs

Botanical motifs in Islamic textiles represents the gardens of Heaven, *Jannat*. These are a popular selection for the contemporary textile designs with calligraphic scripts. Two-dimensional flowers in naturalistic colors and earth tones can been against yellowish and off white backgrounds in the textiles as well the Islamic architecture. These have been painted as frescoes on walls or as inlay tile work.



Figure 41a (left): Middle East, Textile. Talismanic shirt, painted cotton, densely inscribed in Arabic with religious phrases and Quran quotations set in cartouches and grids, Iran, 1750-1900, Length: 74.9cm (From register) Width across the shoulders width: 91.4cm (From register) Woven cotton, ink, bronze and colours, Museum no. T.8-1945, Gift of Mrs. Walter, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O364510/shirt/

Figure 41b (right): *Khushboo* Jacket, Floral printed front open jacket, made from Poly-Crepe, Featuring the words of Sahir Ludhianvi. accessed March 15, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/best-sellers-women/products/khushboo-jacket?variant=41529077596222

Calligraphic letters *Huruf* in Urdu and Arabic

Some apparel textiles carry Urdu and Arabic letter, *huruf,* serving as motifs in compact, clustered and scattered compositions. These are available in various contrasting and monochromatic color schemes according to seasons and collections for events.



Figure 42a (left): Wear Ghalib, "Shawl Collection," accessed March 14, 2026, https://www.wearghalib.com/collections/shawl

Figure 42b (mid and right): Manto, "Scarves, Stoles & Odhnis," *Shop Manto*, accessed March 14, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/scarves-stoles-odhnis

Apparels with Stories

The fully inscribed textiles like *dupattas* and shawls_carry long stories and events written all over the surface of the fabric in contrasting colors tones. These fabrics intrigue the viewer to know the information they carry and hence they serve as documentation of various folks and traditions. One article is inspired by poet Rehman Faris, officer Civil Services. The red *odhni* titled "Sitaray Odhni" features motivational poetry by Allama Iqbal as a reminder to hold onto hope and keep searching and discovering, even when faced with loss and grief. Kurtas inspired by full-text coverage are inspiring pieces of literature and culture. Few examples are discussed below. They are available in various color options in

contrasting backgrounds and calligraphy. They serve as a Tribute to Pakistan's rich Cultural Heritage, featuring the words of Allama Iqbal and Jigar Murad Abadi.



Figure 43a (left): Viscose, is a printed *odhni* featuring the words of Mirza Ghalib in calligraphy, Manto, "Raaz Odhni, Plum," *Shop Manto*, accessed March 15, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/eid-scarves-stoles-odhnis/products/raaz-odhni-plum

Figure 43b (middle): Poetry of Rehman Faris, Wear Ghalib, "Kitaabi Dastaan Shawl – White," Wear Ghalib, accessed March 15, 2026, https://www.wearghalib.com/products/kitaabi-dataan-shawl-white

Figure 43c (right): Manto Clothing Brand Pakistan, "Red Sitaray Odhni," accessed March 15, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/scarves-stoles-odhnis/products/red-sitaray-dupatta



Figure 44a: Manto. "Virsa Lawn Kurta – Brick Red." Accessed March 15, 2026. https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/manto-kurtas/products/virsa-lawn-kurta-brick-red

Figure 44b (right): Manto, "Phool Kurta – Beige & Green," accessed March 15, 2026, https://www.shopmanto.com/collections/manto-kurtas/products/phool-kurta-beige-green

Conclusion

A downfall in the depiction of Calligraphy on Apparel Textiles has been seen in past decades due to following reasons:

- Sacred text cannot be printed or embroidered on dirty or impure clothes
- Textiles with Quranic inscription cannot be worn at inappropriate places
- Quranic verses cannot be treated as decorative or commercial commodity
- Some Islamic scholars debate on the legitimacy of wearing Quranic text as bidʿah (religious innovation)
- Calligraphy has been confined to architecture, book illumination manuscripts and painting

- Instead of clothing, sacred calligraphy is now used in contexts that preserve its dignity

Industrialization and Downfall of Craft:

The effects of Post-colonial westernization has contributed in downfall of the skill of manual calligraphy, industrialization has led to mass production and computer aided designs resulting in a loss in the essence of the craft. Computer aided calligraphy lacks the warmth and soul of hand-drawn letters and can be replicated multiple times hence cannot be considered as a unique crafted piece.

Revival

Hence in order to make a bridge between the traditional crafts and the upcoming generation, designs with calligraphic letters in a meaningless manner are being used as motif element and have been appearing in the market on silk scarfs, dupattas, kurtas, kameez (shirts) in digital printing. This research is a compilation of such Textile collections in order to educate the larger audience for future applications and flexibility towards the art form.

Glossary

1- Jama'ah al-tawiz: Group of amulets

2- Taviz/Tawiz: Arabic root (ʿa-w-dh) meaning 'seeking protection' or refuge. It is a small piece of paper with Quranic inscriptions.

3- Vefḳ/Wafq: Refers to a magic square or numerical talisman made by arranging numbers, letters, or Quranic words in a specific grid. It is used in Islamic occult sciences for spiritual protection, healing, or mystical purposes.

4- Abjad: Abjad is a traditional system in Arabic where each letter has a numerical value. It is used in Islamic mysticism, numerology, and talismanic calculations.

5- Tiraz: Tirāz refers to inscribed or embroidered textiles produced in Islamic courts, usually bearing Arabic calligraphy with the name of the ruler, blessings, or Qur'anic phrases.

6- Kufic: Kufic is one of the earliest styles of Arabic calligraphy, characterized by angular, geometric, and straight lines.

7- Khasso/Khassah: It means special, exclusive, or belonging to the royal or elite class

8- Khilʿa: Khilʿa means "robe of honor."

9- Bidʿah: Means innovation in religious matters

10- Tasbeeh: A **tasbeeh** is a string of prayer beads (like a rosary) to count the recitations and repeated phrases while praising Allah.

11- Hadith: Sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAWW) the last messenger of Allah

12- Malaʾika muqarrabun: Four archangels in Islam (Jibril (brings revelation), Mikail (rain and sustenance), Israfil (Trumpet on Day of Judgement) and Azrael (takes souls)

13- Qasida-e-burda: The poem was written by the famous Egyptian Sufi poet Imam al-Busiri in the 13th century praising Prophet Muhammad (SAWW)

14- Ilm-e-Rujūm / Nujūm: Scientific study of planets, stars, and the universe and the Interpretation of the influence of stars on human destiny and events.

15- Kaaba: The Kaaba is the most sacred place of worship in Islam in the Masjid al Haram in Mecca. The word Kaaba (Kaʿbah) comes from the Arabic root "kaʿb", meaning "cube" or "square-shaped structure."

Abjad Values Table[38]

[38] Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

Letter	Value
Alif (ا)	1
Ba (ب)	2
Jim (ج)	3
Dal (د)	4
Ha (ه)	5
Waw (و)	6
Zay (ز)	7
Ha (ح)	8
Ta (ط)	9
Ya (ي)	10

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