

NEW TRENDS IN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART-POST INDEPENDENCE JOURNEY

KASHYAP PARIKH

Associate Prof & Head, Department of Applied Arts, Faculty of Fine arts, M. S. University of Baroda

Manuscript Info

Submission: 28-10-2019

Acceptance: 15-11-2019

Publication: 05-01-2020

Keywords

Modern Art, Contemporary Art, Indian Art

ABSTRACT

Modern Art is essentially an attempt to perceive and express reality in a subjective and reflective manner. 19th century is an important period representing the rediscovery of the glorious Indian Heritage through the study of history, literature and art. It expressed itself in many forms like cubism, surrealism, expressionism, etc. It is common knowledge that the modern Indian artists might be a heterogeneous group, but modern Indian art is sharply distinguishable from the traditional or classical Indian art by way of forms, colour, composition and treatment of contextual themes. Trends and traditions in modern & contemporary Indian Art can be interpreted as sustaining and diversifying the modernistic approach, rather than completely break away from modernity itself. This could definitely be read as attempts at fostering and perpetuating the already established modes of economic and cultural roles of art in its capitalist dimensions. The influence of British rule was in all sectors including art & culture. Around 1870 traditional Rajasthani & Pahari miniature style started to decline. In 19th century miniature artists started accepting English influence in their subject matter. Slowly new art schools started during the British rule and even after independence. Since then elements in Indian art has seen significant change.

Rabindranath Tagore in his analysis of Art wrote these beautiful words:

"In Art the person in us is sending its answer to the Supreme Person who reveals himself to us in a world of endless beauty across the lightless world of facts."

Swami Vivekananda exclaimed:

"That man cannot be truly religious who has not the faculty of feeling the beauty and grandeur of Art."

To assess the art of painting today is a very arbitrary thing. One requires normally some distance in time to see and judge works of art in their right perspective, to discern whether they have become permanent contributions to the cultural wealth and heritage of a nation or even mankind, or whether they have been ephemeral flowers that gave us pleasure at some time in the past only to be forgotten and left at the roadside as we travelled on. It is particularly difficult today to make any pronouncement on the state of art either in India or anywhere in the world, because the creative efforts of artists as well as the ideas,

tastes and preferences of the art lover are subject to so many conflicting influences of the past and the present, to so many conflicting assertions concerning the nature and purpose of art, that finally any statement one makes must be a very personal and therefore a very arbitrary one. It is possible to set oneself or to accept certain standards to which one adheres but it would be rather rash to claim general or historical validity for them. India has gone through rapid developments in many spheres after independence and the art of painting in India has undergone tremendous changes. I would attribute most of these changes to the freer intercourse between India and the World and the liberalization of the artistic imagination through countless new contacts and experiences which this new intercommunication has brought about. The liberalising effect of such 'opening of doors and windows' was foreseen by Rabindranath Tagore when he wrote:

"I strongly urge our artists vehemently to deny their obligation carefully to produce something that can be labelled as Indian

art according to some old-world mannerism." (1926)

"Let us take heart and make daring experiments, venture out into the open road in the face of all risks, go through experiences in the great world of human mind, defying unholy prohibitions preached by prudent little critics ... when they ask our artists to behave like good children and never cross the threshold of their schoolroom." (1939)

Many of our artists have just done that in the last ten or twelve years, they have made daring experiments, they ventured out into the open road, they have gone through experiences, they have defied unholy prohibitions and they have not behaved like good little children. As a matter of fact, they have behaved like imaginative and responsible artists. And their undeniable successes and achievements have been due almost entirely to themselves, their enquiring and pioneering spirit, their initiative and their experiments, and not to public or private patronage in India.

A picture is indeed worth thousand words. Visual art forms are also 'languages' with their own symbolic systems that people easily identify. The disciplinary configuration of Visual Arts, possibilities and trends in research and experimentation, the challenges and difficulties encountered in understanding the identity of Visual Art and Design in contemporary art are intricate aspects of some of the highly nuanced trajectories of Art educations. Visual Art is subjective and not standardized; thereby affording a greater opportunity for interpretations and appealing to those who might not find their voice in other settings. The complexities of our contemporary visual landscape unleash a plethora of perspectives, world views and reflections. They open up the greatest number of horizons, coloured by socio-cultural imaginary. In this context, it is imperative that we take cognizance of our rich, multi-layered cultural heritage, the edifice on which our visual art community blossom and

flourish. Our contemporary and modern views on artistic experimentations must derive inspirations from the life spring of past history.

There are numerous Indian artists worthy of mention in the study of 20th Cent art, for example, B.C.Sanyal, N.S.Bendre, Hebbler, VivanSundaram, Akbar Padamsea, Tyeb Mehta, F.N.Souza, G.R.Santosh, Raza, Ara, AngoleiElaMenon, M.F.Husain, SatishGujral, Jatin Das, the list just goes on. Then there is the entire Bengal School, which is also considered contemporary' having artists like Nandlal Bose, Abanindranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, Gagendranath Tagore, BenodeBehari, Amrita Sher Gil and Raja Ravi Verma. There's no doubt that contemporary Indian art is at the highest level in the quality, depth and diversity in terms of utilization of elements.

Although major western artists like Picasso, Matisse, Gaugin have admitted and shown influences of elements of Japanese and African art in their work. The influences have been at times not even acknowledged and thus minimized. Picasso was said to have been influenced by African artefacts, he had his own private collection of African totems and other craft, but he never tried to understand their cultural context or what they stood for. He merely learned from their conventional context and the imagery. Same way Indian contemporary artists explored various elements in their artwork.

The 19th century is an important period representing the rediscovery of glorious Indian Heritage through the study of history, literature and art. During this period, the visual art could boast of few achievements and the prospects for future development appeared back. The spirit of art seemed to be flickering out as traditional forms gradually. Ever since Aurangzeb's discouragement of the humanities, and subsequent bankruptcy of war-torn Mughal Empire, Imperial patronage had declined steadily. The unsettled conditions of the times were not well-disposed to the humanities. The placement of the arts failed to improve with

the establishment of the British Empire. The new rules found Indian Art, to say the least, strange; their cultural background did not equip them with any understanding of its physical body, spirit or subject. The painters were brought down to the level of artisans, often underpaid and working in bazaars. Those artists who succeeded in obtaining employment with Indian rulers, continued to work in older traditions and their paintings were often imbued with uncommon sensitivity and beauty.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, artistic expression began to stir again but in another fabric. The admiration for European culture and learning found expression in the work of a group of creative people who sought to develop a new idiom to convey a visual image that was in keeping with the times. They painted Indian subjects and themes using European techniques, western principals of composition and perspective drawing, and a new medium-oil paint. They strove to achieve in Indian Painting what was being accomplished contemporary in Indian Literature and Indian Philosophy. All these trends were a part of the wider phenomenon of cultural osmosis. Among the early attempts in this direction were the works of Raja Ravi Varma who painted subjects from Indian myths and life. His attempts received much attention and some fame. His paintings became extremely popular and reproductions of his works decorated many Indian households.

The style of painting associated with the Bengal school originated with Abanindranath Tagore. He began his study of artistic creation with works of the English traditions. His works were laced with literary overtones and suffused with mystery and lyricism. Abanindranath and his followers, including Nandal Bose formed the nucleus of the Bengal school of painting. The fashion spread from Bengal to the other parts of India.

Watching over the decades of the 40s and the 50s, dominated by the aesthetic values of the School of Paris, the Indian art scene in the 60s witnessed a change in direction: the language of traditional

Indian art came back into reckoning; artists actively entered into dialogue with traditional visual language and reinvented their own contexts. The factors motivating this change were numerous.

Artist and esthetician Jagdish Swaminathan, in New Delhi, opposed the modernist aesthetics brought by the colonial powers. Prof. K. G. Subramanyan, trained at Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan, for his part, played a seminal role in spreading the Santiniketan philosophy, stressing that traditional visual language was a rich art history resource. He used traditional elements with a modernist sensibility giving a new direction to visual language.

By the early 60s a strong feeling of nationhood was palpable. In Madras, KCS Panikar formed the Cholamandalam artists' community. Artists looked anew at traditional sources of imagery. Elsewhere, artists like Ganesh Pyne in Calcutta whose personal sensibilities made him delve into his heritage, also revisited tradition. Jogen Chowdhury, who, following his exposure to European art in Paris stopped working for a while, returned to evolve, a visual language that carried resonances of local customs. Visual traditions, classical, folk and popular, coloured the imagination of various artists in Baroda where Subramanyan played the role of a catalyst. The creative ferment in Baroda urged experiments with the narrative mode and figuration. Gulammohammed Sheikh, Bhupen Khakhar, Jyoti Bhatt, Neelima Sheikh, Laxma God, Jayant Parikh and others charted a new course.

These artists were inspired by the past practices and lasting traditions. They looked anew at the murals, miniature art, illuminated manuscripts and texts as elements in their art. Their imagination absorbed the vitality of decorative elements of tribal and folk arts. In the early 70s, artists have used narrative devices in many ways to transform the mundane into the magical. They dig up the mythic into a world of memory. They use fantasy to express personal concerns and

anxieties, often giving them a dreamlike intensity. On another level, A Ramachandran endows the temporal with a sense of timelessness. In the Incarnation, the beautiful tribal woman, framed by the blossoming flame of the forest tree, stands on a turtle, also a self-portrait of the artist. Another artist who brought a metaphysical dimension to his images was Bombay-based Prabhakar Barwe. Madhvi Parekh's mythic world bristles with folk and tribal imagery of Gujarat. For Gogi Saroj Pal, the mythic image is the expression of a personal mythology. It is linked to the construct of women in a patriarchal society.

A personal mythology also informs the shadowy image world of Ganesh Pyne. The experience of angst pervading the layers of existence harks to an imperial presence. In the late 60s and early 70s, Jogen Chowdhury brought into the public domain personal erotic fantasies that burgeoned with a life of their own in a nocturnal ambience. Both Amit Ambalal and Dharmanarayan Dasgupta introduce a whimsical note into the fantasy images.

The strong mythical or fantasy content in the paintings of artists of the 70s and the 80s continued to be explored by the artists in the next decade to dedicate a new thrust to visual language.

By the middle of 1980s, contemporary Indian art began to chart a new direction. The discourses that dominated the art scene of earlier decades slowly faded away. The younger generation of artists engaged themselves with new concerns. They explored fresh concepts (and the concept acquired pre-eminence, so that the artist's idea became germane to the workplace, leaving him free to commission helpers to complete the task). Postmodern ideas left their mark. They experimented with new media, material and techniques, they rethought the scale of the work attempting site-specific three-dimensional installations and they were prepared to negotiate with both global and local stimuli. Themes involving gender, environment and urban crisis began to surface with images. The vibrancy of

popular culture worked as a major trigger in image-making. Some of the younger artists, even when they were working with representational forms eschewed narrative elements, even as they gave vent to whimsy. In sum, contemporary art tore through the silken veils of the exclusive private gallery ambience and donned an assertive dynamism, a colourful vitality.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that use of contemporary elements is source of inspiration is for Indian artists. The influence of various contemporary elements has given rise in India to a new concept of art. This attitude has enlarged our concepts of art. A rapid change of attitude is noticeable in Indian Contemporary Art, but more diverse individual attitude is traceable in later parts. Younger generations took greater interests in working with global elements and technique in artistic creation, rendering more variations of form, concept and style.

REFERENCE

1. Goetz, H. (1959). Five Thousand years of Indian Art.
2. Goswami, B. N. (1986). Essence of Indian Art, Museum of San Francisco.
3. Zimmer, H. (1964). The Art of Indian Asia Vol.1-2, Bollingen series, Pantheon Books, New York, Barron's.
4. Welch, S. C. (1985) India: Art and culture 1300-1900. New York.
5. Kapoor G. (1978) Contemporary Indian Artists. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
6. Trends and Transitions in Indian, Art Volume XXXVI No.2. Marg Publications.
7. Contemporary Indian Art, Volume XXXVIII No.4. Marg Publications.