

MOVE TOWARDS THE LOCAL AND PERSONAL IDIOM IN PAINTINGS OF POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Present paper throws light on post colonial 2nd generation Indian painters whose desire to engage with actual and virtual realities of the society gained prominence during 1970's. and 1980's. Personal experiences and socio-political unrest provided the required stimulus for highly individual interpretations. The artwork now provoked the viewers to participate in it rather than meekly accept it as a mode of entertainment. Certain naturalistic principles and elements of representation were being challenged and figures on canvas were not solely based on observation but also based on conceptualisation. Different norms of anatomical reconfiguration with strong imagery showed a deliberate shift from academic representation, exploring the individual stylistic choices. Some of the artists used narrative devices to weave stories with descriptive backgrounds relating to specific time and place and certain life experiences whereas others opted for a non representational art, enhancing the formal qualities of line, form and colour. The need to release the repression of consciousness, positions itself through the understanding of postmodernism.

Keywords: Post Colonial Painters, Narrative Devices, Stylistic Choices.

Introduction

During 1970 the artists in India grew up in an environment facing challenges due to social disparity regardless of living in a democratic nation where every citizen has a voice. Issues such as communal tension after partition, inequality, subdued position of women in society, casteism and political power games affected the administration (Mago 108). These postcolonial 2nd generation artists who belong to different backgrounds observed strong differences between an idealistic nation and its ground realities. In such scenarios they were compelled towards a highly subjective approach in their artworks. They weren't driven by an art movement or a group, instead followed individualistic outlook in representation of surroundings.

Art practices based on local realities including indigenous elements gained momentum in Baroda art college. This can be seen in the works of KG Subramanian initially and later followed by many artists. Figural forms were reinvented with an innovative approach that were in dialogue with their lives in post independence India (Bean 123)

Narrativeness was one of the features that emerged in the pictorial space of many artists such as Gulam Mohammad Sheikh and Bhupen khakkar, reminiscent of episodes from history. Most of the artists at that point of time negotiated with indianness, modernism and influence of modern art. Several Indian artists enthusiastically followed modern western art whereas others adopted abstract art. While

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some felt the need to create something that cannot be considered as a replica and also doesn't fall back on ancient heritage alone. The quest was to draw something that arises from the environment in the artist's own lives.

Stylized Figurative Trends

The common thoughts among the artists of this time period was to express certain anxieties of existing times and the prevailing psychological crisis in the society. Creating personal figurative styles gained momentum that became their source of contribution. Manjeet Bawa, himself a flutist, found a divine connection between music and painting depicting Krishna and his flock on his canvas. Finding similarities between music and colors, he believed in transferring the rhythm of music in his art, using a monochromatic background that produced a pure sensation of color against white delicate figures. Bawa along with Bhupen Khakkar and Jogen Chowdhary discarded the anatomical correctness of colonial art teaching and set themselves free to compose figural forms emerging in their own style.

With a strong sense of individuality Jogen Chowdhary's subject emerged from surroundings and society, particularly the middle class life of an ordinary human being (Tuli 242). He portrayed the human body independent of the limitations of time and space with numerous lines in pen and ink on paper which continued to be his preferred medium initially. *'Tiger in the moonlight'* (see fig.1) was an allegorical painting on emergency by Jogen. In depiction of characters he crossed the boundaries of realistic representation and rendered the images with an individualistic approach that reflects stylization of certain indigenous elements. Creating pictorial metaphors with a range of versatility, Jogen draws inspiration from his own culture. His dreamy satirical images of symbolic significance have the quality of mystery and magic.

In the line of exploring innovative methods for representing human forms Rameshwar Broota engaged himself in an art that has a kind of universality that everybody could relate to. Initially he painted satirical images in response to social disparity (Bhaskar 25). Mi lol "I thought that this kind of subject is very local, very personal and art has to go beyond this." Evolution of male figure with the effect created by his own special scratching technique generated an atmosphere of undesirable truth. There is always a question of masculinity in his artworks in which he juxtaposes man with architectural elements and machines, creating conflicts and posing challenges to acclaimed heroism of man.

Laxma Gaud had a passion for lines that he expressed in his etchings and drawings. The vibrancy of rural existence was conveyed with great passion in his works. Cultural storytelling was an integral part of his paintings with laborious details on clothing and ornament.

Primitive surreal sexuality always dominated his work reflecting a deep sensitivity towards humanity, inviting the viewers to feel the beauty of human connection.

Pictorial Narrativeness

Post independence second generation artists of Baroda played a major role in shaping the art from local to personal. They used narrative devices in different ways to transform quotidian into extraordinary and magical (Kapur 313). Bhupen Khakkar represented the mundaneness of day to day life of urban middle class as evident in painting such as *The Deluxe tailor* and *Barber's shop* (see fig.2). Later homosexuality became the central theme of his paintings making his art genuinely confessional. He portrayed the complexities of an individual in contradiction with Indian society with diverse art influences ranging from Indian miniature to Chinese painting and pop art. In the last years of his life while suffering illness, he represented imageries having wounds and oozing blood, emphasizing on dark aspects of human existence. Bhupen was probably the first known Indian artist whose art needs to be acknowledged as revolutionary movement in the history of South Asian painting.

Believing in the existence of the past as a living entity along with the present real world Gulam Mohammad Sheikh added elements from Mughal and Persian domains. He considers his paintings as journeys in which he travels with his emotions, ideas and layers of memories. His use of architectural elements like stairs, rooms, windows and pillars provided him the required space for his narratives. Combined together these elements form an inter relationship for example in the painting *'City'* (see fig.3) where he created figures from history and from characters of day to day life there by merging past into present. Narrativeness touches upon multiple layers and images are never linear in character (Tuli 246). Images have the power to relate to surroundings, the metaphors of the past and the immediate world. Apart from Sheikh, narrativeness was also being followed by the Bhupen Khakkar, Neelima Sheikh, Sudhir Patvardhan and many others. These artists left the linear narrative pattern and incorporated multiple narrativeness within their compositional structure. Many actions actually happen in different

sections of the painting telling us several tales on a single canvas. Views on the practices of art were published in magazine 'Vrishchik' (scorpion) which Sheikh and Khakkar edited together in Baroda from 1969 to 1973. Various articles by art critic Geeta Kapur were also published during this period that helped to highlight Baroda's influence in shaping art.

Mumbai artist Geive Patel as a painter becomes a keen observer of gestures of people around him and evokes varied meanings in his layers of work as a poet. He was a practicing physician, playwright and a self-taught artist whose work focussed on concerns of environment and local life of people in the city. With bold brush strokes, abstraction and realism seem to get merged in his paintings. His brush work allowed him to explore the complexity of figures set within cityscapes. In a similar way Sudhir Patwardhan, a radiologist painted human figures in urban and natural environments. His painting put a pause on the busy streets of Mumbai and at the same time activated a response in the view of two-way communication. Following the path of Khakkar and Patel, he embraced figurative painting that connected with the masses. Better known as people's painter Patwardhan's paintings explore subjects that are real and tangible.

Resonance of Urban Imagery

Among Calcutta artists of this generation Bhattacharya and Ganesh Pyne took forward the trend of depicting personal experience and descriptive imagery. Bhattacharya captured moments of time with mysterious qualities and dramatized narrativeness (Bean 132). Following the academic realism influenced by the painting of American painter Andrew Wyeth, Bhattacharya's highly symbolic and surrealistic works evoked varied emotions in the viewers. The major impact on his art was during 1970's when his city Kolkata was gripped by naxalite attacks, frustrated jobless youth and a climate of fear and suspicion. At that time he created 'Doll' series (see fig. 4) portraying the vulnerability that people felt during those days. At times when realism in art was considered as a regression in the post-independence era, Bhattacharya embraced it by exploring the city's sights and scenes on the lanes of Kolkata.

Another Kolkata artist Ganesh Pyne joined the society of contemporary artists with a vocabulary based on human skeletal form. Witnessing piles of dead bodies at Calcutta riots of 1946 during childhood Pyne carried its trauma which is reflected in his paintings with dark background. Considering death as a reality of life, Pyne explored its different aspects in tempera medium. There was an element of dream in his paintings which was both fascinating and disturbing to the viewers (Bean 170). "My childhood memories revolve around Kolkata. The sounds and smells of this city fill my being."

Paradigm shift Reflected by Women Artists

During this period many women artists emerged who played a significant role in giving impetus to the shift towards personal imagery (Dalmia 58). Among the pioneers were Nasreen Mohammadi, Arpita Singh, Neelima Sheikh and Nalini Malani. Nasreen followed a distinct path by exploring geometrical abstraction with pen and pencil on paper. A deviation from the dominant figuration and narrative painting in India can be seen in Mohammadi's black and white photographs of architecture. Without applying any colour she continued exploring her art based on the link between the natural and the outer world. In 1970 she produced a series of photographs on architectures of Chandigarh city and Mughal city of Fatehpur Sikri. Over the years she became successful in gaining international recognition with her distinct visual language. Arpita Singh's highly narrative paintings with folk art influences and modern approach throws a large shadow on the modernity of Indian art. She had a long and noteworthy devotion to the painting medium with a unique personal visual vocabulary. In a few of her paintings, figures and texts come together interactively. According to Arpita Singh her biggest tribute to folk art was her painting 'Wish dream' (see fig. 5) auctioned at Saffron for INR 9.6 cr. Her ungrounded floating figures with bright colors in an abstract space defines a relationship between figures and the surrounding space. Her abstract works and drawings draw inspiration from study of stitches, weaving patterns, lines and dots. Neelima Sheikh of Delhi revealed injustice faced by Indian women in her series of tempera paintings 'When Champa grew up' (see fig. 6). Her narrative works demonstrate feminine sensibility and socio-cultural concerns and intense empathy towards her subject. Nalini Malani's work depicted discrimination against women by building a narrative that involves literary and mythological references of past and present. For Malani it was against the right to consider women as divinity and at the same time objects of use. Suffering of women during partition and later can be seen in her multimedia installations such as 'Remembering Toba Tek Singh' (1998), 'Hamlet machine' (1999), 'Stains' (2000), 'Unity in diversity' (2003), 'Mother India: Transaction in construction of pain' (2005).

Conclusion

Personal mythology and fantasy dominated the art scene till the mid- 1980s when the advent of new media, material and techniques gave rise to diverse individual attitudes. Post colonial 2nd generation artists now begin to tie up the loose ends of the radical impulses left by the preceding artists and continue to transmit their impulses to the next generation. Resonances of Gieve Patel and Sudhir Patwardhan can be seen in the works of Apurva Desai. Bhupen Khakkar played a significant role in the painterly development of artists like Atul dojiya and Amit Ambalal. Contemporary abstraction by Nasreen Mohammadi re enforced the elements of design. Jogen Chowdhary's artistic discipline was highly instinctive and created aesthetic tension through its stillness and by evolving a sense of distortion in his stereotypical figures influenced by Kalighat pictures, thereby merging the universal and the Indian. This distortion of figures molded the standards of beauty which later influenced the works of several artists. This acknowledgement of freedom and change was carried by these artists for a number of years with a diversity of forms within the same idiom, thereby creating a paradigm shift for the younger generation of artists.

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Fig.1: Jogen Chowdhary (1981) *Tiger in the moonlight*

(source: jogenchowdhury.net)



Fig. 2: Bhupen Khakkar (1973).Barber's shop

(source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/KoxCzd9hPex89jJn6>)



Fig. 4: Bikas Bhattacharya(1970).Dollseries,oil on canvas by

(Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/EofAvA7tJEE5q5vo9>)

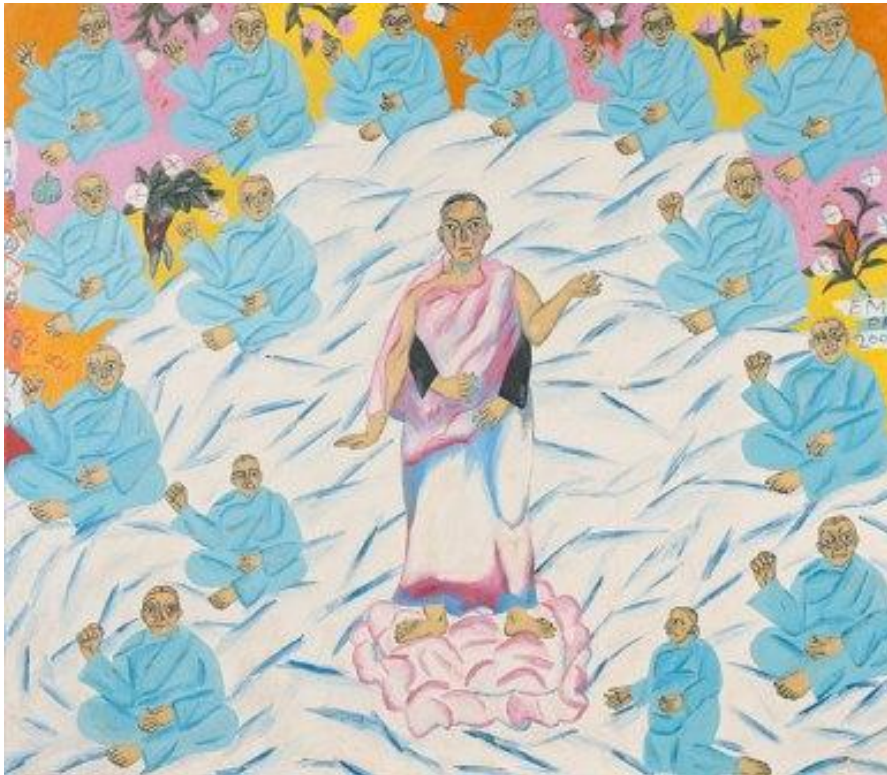


Fig.5: Arpita Singh(2001)Wish dream,16 panels ,oil on canvas

(Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/MLgW1dw1xm9bacgH9>)



Fig. 6: Nilima Sheikh(1985).When Champa grew up series ,tempera on sangneri paper

(Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/6UxeFRGV8pzeVVUA6>).

