

Chapter III

The Personal Space of Woman: Paintings of Arpita Singh

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3.1 Resistance in Arpita's Painting: Stereotyping the Image of Man

Arpita Singh is one of the important painters of contemporary India whose image of women is mostly with reference to women's personal day-to-day world and she brings it forth through an inner vision. She has also claimed that her works should be viewed from a 'women perception'. She has taken things as her visual elements from Indian traditional culture and expressive of women's activities in typical Indian cultural set-up.

Along with her academic study, she gathered knowledge of the naive tradition of art from Indian folk culture. She also took elements from the reminiscent of *Kantha stitch* designs of rural Bengal. Arpita's uniqueness lies in her interweaving of such naïve traditions with regular activities of urban life. She has also used elements from her own urban surroundings, such as the child like graffiti, alphabets and numbers, toys, toy birds, traffic signals, crowded roads, automobiles, aero planes, guns and so many others. She transfused these daily usable, common elements and fun objects as constitutive of a sign of individual 'icons' to explore some small narratives through her pictorial space.

She also used in most of her paintings a decorative bordering space like *Pata Chitra*¹ (Scroll paintings) folk tradition of Bengal. Bengali ritualistic practice of 'Vratas'² also inspired her works. *Vratas* are generally practiced and performed by the women of Bengal as well as India in different occasions. These *Vratas* are usually practiced for the welfare of men (husband, son etc of the performer) or for the whole family and the sufferings (starvation and other practices) involved in these rituals are taken solely by the women members of the family. But still these rituals have some pro-woman aspects, such as *Vrata* could give woman a personal space

where her world is not being controlled by the society of men and *Vrata* could make an ambience of sisterhood where women are free to perform it with other women. These positive aspects of *Vratas* have influenced Arpita Singh to create a space for women and also a separate style has developed in her canvas through the folk signs and motifs of Bengali *Vrata* and *Pata Chitra*.

Arpita Singh was inspired by Chagall and Rousseau's metaphysical paintings in her early works. She seems to filter the fluid images of her unconscious being and tried to make them visible. She interpreted the dream like situation from her personal experiences and executed those dreams through the decorative patterns and textural motifs. She used to represent men images in well draped manner with due sophistication whereas her women images are almost nude. She fabricated women images in free flowing linear execution like a tapestry with small and delicate motifs from the Indian folk tradition. Arpita Singh tried to build a 'secret world of women' in her paintings. Her colours are bright and symbolic with the use of specific articulation of relative temperature and hue, which made her nude woman images more real and freed them from the construction of so-called femininity. These women images of Arpita are no more silent like the stereotyped representation of the women in the notions of beauty. She tried to expose the immolate images of women and their internal psyche through their exposed gestures. These women who are silent by the common oppressions of patriarchy are vulnerable and they became cornered when they surfaced in an insecure place. These images that Arpita Singh has executed in her paintings are always aware and ready to face what comes from the other world. She was referred to by the curator Baruna Bhattacharjee in the catalogue of her solo exhibition, where Arpita told that: 'I am a woman, I think as a woman, I see as a woman, my references are always feminine-- this is the starting point. This does not mean that I am always referring to the female form or femininity. I pick up things as a woman would pick up, project them as a woman would project, build up the space around them or with them, as a woman would do. To be more precise, I, a woman, am talking about things now and here.

I know what then the work grows the starting point melts, references become signals to lead anybody or everybody to the desired place. I don't

remember myself, the fame breaks and I, the woman, stand there as anybody, as everybody.' (Bhattacharjee, 1996, Catalogue).

Here the images of woman are beholding a resistance through their unclothed body; the body which is one of the important tools of politics of patriarchy. Arpita tried to secure woman's own secret space (world) in an *other* reality and tried to bring up a resistance by the unclothed and exposed body. The body³ that was once a tool for men becomes a threat upon them through the works of Arpita.

Arpita Singh has consciously broken the frame of feminine constructions and put her images 'as anybody' or 'as everybody'. These images have created several perspectives of resistance by questioning the so-called norms and systems of the society. They have questioned the issues constructed by patriarchy such as 'the norms of beauty', 'the representation of femininity', and 'the women-body' etc. any kind of representation is politics because representation continually constructed some identity either group or individual. Kadiatutu Kanneh

told: 'Black and female identities are not simply figurative or specific sites of play and metafore, but occupy Vary real political spaces of diaspora, dispossession and resistance.' (Kanneh, 1995, p.348) .

Arpita's women images are not shaped in the notion of gender difference and also created the resistance through the typical representation of her male images. The male figures of Arpita's paintings represent a different imagery, which are not quite focused in the natural heroic gesture of a man. They are more organized, well dressed and self-carried with a good presentable form well-fitted to a corporate life compared to the bare and brave images of women.

These contrast imageries of men have created numerous signifiers of patriarchal gazes which manifested the reasons of gender discrimination. Arpita always tried to show critically a growing sense of danger and insecurity of the society. Her canvases are the witnesses of a society where a whole system is breaking up. The insecurity and insaneness of life (mainly of woman) became more prominent. She uttered a line from her favourite poet Octavio Paz to relate the insecurity of the present days in an interview taken by Ella Dutta that, 'I am an admirer of Octavio Paz. There is a line of his which I like, "*Don't cross the central park at night.*" I respond to the note

of warning that goes beyond the specific locale of Central Park in New York. The insecurity that I feel about life today is reflected in the choice of colours—the grays and browns...’ (Dutta, 1996, Catalogue)

The stereotyped images of men wearing suits or jackets in Arpita’s paintings represented a timeless monotony of a so called normativity of the society. The painting *'Watching'* (pl. 42) would be a perfect example of Arpita's representation of male images. In this painting the seated men are looking at their right (profile view). They are trying to look at something which is not very clear from their vision. As if a group of spectators are trying to peep at the inner area of the wings (wings of stage is a deliberate obstruction for the viewers) in a theatrical show. Are these men waiting for a climax with their exciting faces? They are not at all worried or tensed, but they are excited in the passion of a pre-occupied mindset. The excitement of men images is a common phenomenon of male gaze, and it happens when a man observes a woman. The excitement of the gaze is also carried out through their wrinkled skins and crashed clothes. The whole background is painted flat with the scribbles of letterings which brought up a pseudo intellect of institutionalized knowledge. Knowledge is the equipment of an institution or a synonym of power, which is mostly operated by the patriarchal society with its systematic constructions. Here Arpita has synchronized the systematic order of patriarchal norms through the alphabets (knowledge) and their corporate representative -- the man. In this composition men are sitting upon the rows of red plastic chairs, which are cheap and readily available in market. Arpita perhaps tried to make a total ambience of today’s market, where everything is to be judged and valued in the scale of capitalist power and it ultimately serves the demand and interest of patriarchy.

'Evening Walk' (pl. 43) is another painting of Arpita Singh where she showed the images of men, who are walking and some motor cycles are entering right into the upper frame of the picture. Here also she represented nine male images uniformly draped in white suits and black coats, looking profile (not straight). The figures are walking in the same direction putting one hand in the pocket of their coat. The images are perfectly representing a stereotyped behavior of men (in general), what they are used to inherit from the society as the legitimate right of men. Arpita showed a diagram of an unknown map lying under the feet of the walking men; it created a metaphor

of state or country that is ruled by the power of men. These two pictures are carrying a typical profile look of man that may signify another patriarchal construction. Here all men are looking at same direction without having any pre planned understanding. This is how men grew up with the spontaneous knowledge of watching women and they became used to with this construction.

Arpita is used to take her references from contemporary events. Basically the references are taken from the catastrophic incidents that created and constructed by the people of power. Arpita has encoded such contemporary event in her large canvas measuring 7 feet by 9 feet (84" x 108") under the title, '*Whatever is Here*' (pl. 44), in the year 2006. In this painting Arpita showed a shattering violence and subversive encounter of Gujrat riot⁴ happened in India in 2002. This painting proves that she has not watched the incident only as a sensitive or intellectual citizen but she was psychologically involved along with the disaster of the violence of riot. She did not execute the violence directly like a story board normally viewed in newspaper documentation or magazine article. Her work was different in concept which was explained by the critic of Indian art, Ella Dutta, 'Instead, it is internalized and expressed through a cryptic code of subtle metaphors'. (Dutta, 2006. p. 6)

The Codes, described as cryptic by the critic Ella Dutta, are executed in this painting by Arpita with detailed and delicate lettering at the top of the frame, where she wrote.

'KEY/CODE.PASSOWORD' and then put the serial code as follows.

1. EPIC HEROS
2. MERCE NARIES
3. COURTI
4. HOLY M(EN)
5. TANK
6. WAR WIDOWS, (100)
7. WO(MEN) VIOLATED
8. AEROPL(ANE)
9. GUN

10. LOST RIV(ER)

11. ARABIAN S(EA).

(The words within brackets are overlapped by the images of horses)

All these codes are having a key or password that could explain the metaphors of the individual code. The code 'Lost River' is attached with the controversial political issue of tracking the fabulous *Saraswati* River. She maps a river 'which is buried under layers of experience and continues to nurture life by its subterranean flow.' (Dutta, 2006. p. 6). The codes like '6. War Widows' or '7. Women Violated' also signify the war as power politics of man and the woman as victim. The war death is considered as martyr and they became immortal patriot in view of nationalism. But what is left for women, who lost their husband, father or son? Those women are consciously violated from the incidents and facts of a war. Thereby a question spontaneously comes out from this painting that there were many Epic Heroes (Code 1) in the history under names of men, but why there were no epic 'Hero' under the name of any woman?

Arpita expressed a serious critique against patriarchy through her masculine images, which not only strengthened the resistance of women but also brought up some important questions to encounter the ambiguous gazes of male psyche. When Arpita paints her woman images they always become unique and different from each other, which deliberately oppose the stereotyped images of man created in her works. The woman images are having difference in expression and body language. They are sometimes draped, sometimes nude, sometimes draped transparently to show their own inner being. Her woman images are neither the representative of man nor they are feminine. They are strongly having their own identity to make them liberated into the image of '*Other*'.

3.2 The Personal Space of Woman: From Abstraction to Calligraphy

Arpita Dutta born in 1937 left Kolkata to New Delhi with her mother and brother in 1946 when India could be marked as undergoing 'a period of crisis in the promise of new beginning'. In 40's decade there were some new cultural revolution, which had taken place in Calcutta and Bombay through

the establishment of art groups, galleries, theatre groups and writers' organizations. Also in Delhi some new art groups were established in 40s and 50s. Delhi Shilpi Chakra', the art group was founded in 1949 by the Delhi based artists like B.C. Sanyal, Kanawal Krishna and Sailoja Mukherjee among others.

In the post independent period the art activity was inspired by two important factors in New Delhi. The first one was *Delhi Shilpo Chakra*, where the artists like B.C.Samyal, Sailoja Mukherjee, Kanawal Krishna, started an enthusiastic flow of art activity along with Dhanraj Bhagat, K.S.Kulkarni, Pran Nath Mago and others. These artists brought a new trend of art and they deliberately denied the patronization of big merchants. Artists of *Shilpo Chakra* selected their so called studio in the park of the roadside of Connaught Place at New Delhi. They started critiquing the art works of each other and through this self criticism, the artists of *Shilpo Chakra* became more confident about their self identity. In a conversation with Neville Tuli in 1993, B.C. Samyal told, 'We decided that we will not seek patronage... you must uphold the dignity of the artist..... we would show our work and self criticism, then the consensus would appear,....' (Tuli, 1997, p. 207)

The second factor was rooted under the flourish of 'Dhoomimal Gallery'. Ram Chandra Jain who was the owner of an art-accessory shop in Connaught Place, had transformed his shop into an art gallery to promote the serious young talents of India in the field of visual art.

After the completion of her school period, Arpita admitted in the Department of Fine Arts at the Delhi polytechnic in the year 1954 and the then principal of Art College was Shri Bhabesh Samyal.// In the department her favorite teachers were Sailoz Mukherjee, Biren Dey, Avinash Chandra etc. There she studied art up to 1959. These five years of her art college, she came into the contact with Indian tradition, art and culture and became familiar with the contemporary art scenario of India.

Two major art organizations were established in the year, 1954 in New Delhi, the *National Gallery of Modern Art* (MGMA) and the *Lalit Kala Akademi* (LKA). National Gallery of Modern art helped many promising artists like Arpita Dutta to be familiar with the works of different Indian contemporary artists from 1930's, 40's and 50's decade. Lalit Kala Akademi

was established to promote the art of promising contemporary young artists. It had started to organize different programmes in visual arts. The National Exhibition of Lalit Kala Academi became a highly dignified show. The exhibitions like biannual and triennial organized in a particular gap of period by *Lalit Kala Akademy* had also exposed the contemporary art scenario of the world.

Arpita began her career as a professional artist from the decade of sixties and she achieved certain position as an individual artist in 70's. In 1960's she joined the artists' group '*The Unknown*' as a founder member, with other members of the alumni of the department of Fine Arts of Delhi Polytechnic. The first group show of the *Unknown* was held at IENS Building in 1962 and in the same year Arpita married fellow artist Parmjit Singh and eventually became known as Arpita Singh. Arpita Participated in the group show titled '*In memory of Sailoz Mukherjee*' at Kunika Chemould Art Centre with other contemporary artists in the year 1963. After this group show Arpita began to participate in various other group shows in Delhi and other parts of India. In 1963 she joined the job of weavers service centre but left the job in the year 1967 when her daughter was born. Birth of a girl-child was a significant event in Arpita's life. As a mother of a daughter she beholden various signs of multi dimensional character; a mother who sometime plays the role of a protagonist of a beloved girl-child, again she shifted her image to sheer cruelty of a mother of a girl-child. Geeta Kapur analyzed this contrast image of artist,

'She (Arpita) transforms the solitude of mature desire to a state of magnificence. Yet, as if in desperate remembrance, this mother holds her child in the manner of a phallic substitute. This double image sublimates the envy and cruelty and grace and confusion of being a woman.' (Kapur, 2000, p. 39)

Later Arpita painted numerous paintings, almost a series upon various discourses on the subject '*woman with a girl-child*' in the last decade of 20th century.

On the discussion of the paintings of Bikash Bhattacharya in the realm of socio-political fluxes of 1960s in the previous chapter, it has been already made clear that there was a country wide change in 60's decade. Also in Delhi, artists and intellectuals accepted this new change under certain

notions of *Indianness*. Delhi based artists refused the national practices of modern art or art under the spell of Western influences imbibed by the artists of 30's and 40's decade. In this connection the establishment of '*Group 1890*'⁵ and their exhibition in October 1963 in New Delhi was highly important, because they had directly manifested their vision against the so-called nationalist politics of art with a fusion of typical western modernity.

Beside this changing cultural ethos of 1960's, the enthusiastic role of *Cholamandal School* was also important. The school established a new phenomenon of Indian identity in visual art through the creation of an alternative to the artistic derivatives of westernized modernism. Neville Tuli wrote about the changes in 60's decade and the role of *Cholamandal School*,

'Thus by the mid-1960's the tide of change was entrenched. A reaction against the partially justified tag of Indian modern art being derivative had set in and the realization that an Indian identity must be re-created, capable of absorbing the modernisms and emerging with something fresh, became the motivating principle of the 1960s; As a group, the Cholamandal School would best reflect this reaction, while Husain would dominate individual attention.' (Tuli, 1997, p. 219)

In 60's decade Arpita's works were often reflected the dream like scenes, where she drew motifs from the references of daily life such as bottles, playing cards etc. Her works were not textural in those days and she used to paint flatly on the canvas. During that period Arpita Singh was not directly involved with the artistic changes of 1960s, because it was a preparatory phase of a would-be artist like Arpita Singh, who then was in a crucial search of her own individual persona. For Arpita, the decade was a phase of random experimentation of different ideas of art in a vast arena of changing dynamics of life. She sometimes was influenced by Western Art, especially Marck Changall, sometime she tried to uproot herself from the heritage of Indian culture and tradition. She borrowed images from the toys, motifs and folks and put them with minimal forms to record an essential drama of particular sequences. Geeta Kapur described her art in 80's decade under the Modernist perception,

'Since the 1960's she has been among the committed modernists in Indian art understanding the terms of reference down to the details: impasto

brushwork, irradiating hues, informal design, chance encounters, erased dreams.' (Kapur, 2000, p. 39)

It has already referred to in the second chapter that two important events had taken place in 60's decade i.e. '*The two Decades of American Art (1967-68) Exhibition*' and '*The First Triennial*' organized by *Lalit Kala Akademi*. These two events were highly important to the promising artists like Arpita Singh to have an idea and experience of the Global development of art. It was a crucial time for Arpita, when she was struggling with her paint and canvases, to search some unique content as her individual style. But there was no doubt or ambiguity towards her own creative identity from beginning of her career. She was conscious about her creations and had chosen her themes from her own experiences as a woman. She had told later in an interview with Tuli:

'I like to paint, draw the most familiar, what I see everyday, know it, live it, otherwise I cannot draw. This thing of people sitting, perhaps my life is like that. I cannot say why I like to do these things, perhaps I am just made like this.....perhaps painting is a way of understanding those things like when you are a child and are practicing handwriting. That is your way of understanding the alphabets and letters; it is almost like that.' (Tuli, 1997, p. 387)

The first one person show of Arpita Singh was held at Kunika Chemould Art Centre, New Delhi, organized by Roshan Alkazi in the year 1972. 70's decade was an important period in Arpita's artistic carrier, because this decade had opened up a new arena of visual imagery to the artist. Arpita had started to paint with flowers in the beginning of 70's decade and her flower series became the pioneering step towards the identity of an individual creator. '*Figures and flower series*' (pl. 45) is one of the important examples of Arpita's painting where she showed the reality of everyday incidents on a relaxed playing mood with the application of delicate oil paint like glossy and gaudy enamel pigments. Apparently anybody can find a joy of colour and dynamic movement through these paintings. Through the spontaneous use of playful colours and rhythmic brushstrokes, she successfully achieved the phenomenon of self-freedom; which approaches towards the continuity of self experience and search of the identity. Arpita

told at a conversation with Neville Tuli in 9th September 1993, 'Well it is difficult to say, but I believe that, after all I am not the first or last human being, I am past of a chair. The exact stock whose wish, I don't know. Maybe they have concentrated in me, perhaps. Thus if I say that this is the reason why I have made the flowers or placed the figures. I don't know, I really don't know, because that part of memory, all I remember is the form, not the cause that I have forgotten.' (Tuli, 1997, p. 248)

In the mid-70's Arpita brought a new change in her visual world. She started experimentation with black and white *Calligraphic Drawing* (pl. 46). Her drawing surface gradually became textural with the application of undercoated and over coated ground and pigmentations. Space and forms of the paintings became abstract with the effect of unread and unexpected rains of the ancient inscriptions. The important notion of the abstraction of her calligraphic works was established as the idea of a certain minimal vision. The abstraction did not come from the pure form or essential values of modernist ideas, but reflected a minimalist nature, (a Sixties movement in the West and America) where the reductive process became the primary element for certain visual narratives.

In 1975, she participated in a workshop at Kaushani in Himachal Pradesh organized by Vivan Sundaram, where Arpita developed her new technique in oil painting. She "Covered the surface of the canvas with black paint and then covered the undercoat thickly with white paint. Then she scratched away the white paint revealing the black paint underneath. The markings were primitively lines and dots and the abstract markings looked like some script fallen into oblivion." (Dutta, 2006, p. 101)

In the late 70's Arpita's abstract drawings become playful illusion as if knitted elements. Her immediate contemporary Nasreen Mahamedi was also an abstract painter, who fused her structures in a network of repeated lines. Nasreen's Zen-like self-reality and her use of linear dimension like Op Art created an inner-turmoil, a trauma where both the artists, Nasreen and Arpita seems to be preoccupied by some modernist idioms.

One of the Drawings in later period, dated November 7th 2003 has the resemblance of her early abstract works, where she depicted scratched scripture or calligraphy. This '*Drawing*' (pl. 47) is drawn with ink on paper but

the lines and dots had created an abstraction of unexplored inscriptions, which apparently has no meaning, but exposed an inner psyche of continuity of form (eg. See *Other Drawings* pl. 48).

3.3 Motifs and Ornamentations: Space of Personal Narratives

A dramatic change came in Arpita Singh's painting in the beginning of 1980s. She had shifted from abstraction and started to paint the distorted images of playful objects upon her canvases. The images of toys and motifs became prominent in her paintings again. In 80s she was consciously accumulated the images of folk elements in her works. Her women images became more exposed, bared and metaphorically drawn in the impossible postures. The surface of her paintings became ornamented with patterns of colours and textures. She introduced a frame within the canvas frame to discriminate two spaces in one painting. This was the beginning of a new journey of Arpita, who made her way towards a real search of self as a woman, as a mother, as an artist or as an individual being.

Geeta Kapur critically analyzed Arpita's modernist position in comparison with Nasreen Mahamedi and criticized Arpita's choice of elements from modernist's perception in the contexts of popular folk motifs. Also, the paintings where Arpita executed the ornamented surface, are analyzed by Kapur as pointing a way towards women's existence within (either/or) modernist connotations. Kapur observes:

'...Arpita got around mainstream modernist shaped through male hands by the use of decorative patterning. She participated in the reconstitution by women of the function and form of art via ornament within/without modernism... One should continue to see Arpita's work within the spectrum of modernist sensibilities. Her work makes the kind of cross-reference that modern artists have throughout made to native conventions, the more so when these are living traditions of folk icons, textiles and handicraft in their midst...In this multiple perspective one can see the ornamental principle in Arpita's paintings to be as much a modernist and indigenist as it is a feminist proposition. (Kapur, 2000, p. 40, 42, 43)

The ornamental approach in Arpita's work is surely an important identical phenomenon with her personal images and narratives. She used motifs and

symbols through the execution of simplified forms which made her forms ornamental in the painted surface. Though these ornamental forms represent various metaphors, they get transmuted more into certain signifiers in proximity with various feminist discourses. But it is difficult to agree with Kapur that those patterns and motifs (which may create the effect of ornamentation) should be viewed in the modernist perception because these ornamental forms are not borrowed directly from folk elements, but implemented by Arpita from her daily experiences (past and present) and they become the individual signs with their own images and narratives.

Hence, Arpita's paintings seem to be read with different connotation. The paintings, which always reflect the image of resistance and subvert the stereotyped normative of so-called social constructions, may primarily be viewed in the postcolonial or feminist discourses rather than the theoretical practices of modernism or even post modernism. Ornamentation in visual arts, through the repetition of forms, was basically a modernist practice. But in Arpita's work there is always a tension between form and space with linear and non linear contours that breaks the nature of ornamentation. Therefore her painting could be read in a different vision where motifs are more prevalent than ornamented forms; because each motifs of Arpita's painting is unique and carries some signifiers within and across the space of canvas.

In fact, the problem lies in use of the term 'ornamentation', because Kapur wanted to club two different aspects in this use, one is modernism and the other is feminism. But the word 'ornamentation' is not constructed to denote feminism, rather femininity, by the modernist cultural practices in early 20th century. There were many activities in 19th and 20th century to propagate women power and their egalitarian role in society. But subsequently in the name of women empowerment, the mainstream cultural practice of the male dominated society constructed some notions for the women (in general) to characterize the image of woman as an individual. The terms like modest, soft, calm, patient, sacrificing, affectionate, monogamist, pure, shameful, virgin etc. are used particularly to project the quality of a typical woman. These are the anilities under the norms of femininity, which could make an individual a perfect woman. The patriarchal constructions of femininity and typical woman are often denied by Arpita on many occasions. Toril Moi⁶, put

a clear dimension on the controversy of femininity/feminism in her essay, '*Feminist, Female, Feminine*', and observed that:

'Femininity is a cultural construct: one isn't born a woman; one becomes one, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it. Seen in this perspective, patriarchal oppression consist of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are natural. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labeled both unfeminine and unnatural. It is in the patriarchal interest and these two terms (femininity and femaleness) stay thoroughly confused. Patriarchy in other words, wants us to believe that there is such a thing as essence of femaleness called femininity. Feminists, on the contrary, have to disentangle this confusion, and must therefore always insist that though women undoubtedly are female, this in no way guarantees that they will be feminine.' (Moi, 1997, p.108)

Ornamentation also denotes the quality of femininity in a certain cultural context. Ornamentation had played an important role on many occasions in 19th and 20th century to signify the quality of femininity or femaleness. Now it should be examined if the term ornamented has any definite meaning. Can Arpita's paintings be viewed through the spectacle of ornamentation as being within modernist perspective? Are the particle-elements, which usually painted/scattered in her surface ornamentations? Or are they only motifs, derived from her self-politics and then placed within the discourse of feminism?

The painting '*Girl on a Lotus leaf*' (pl. 49) (1995) can be taken as an example of the image of resistance in Arpita's typical stylistic imagery and space organization. She had exhibited this painting in the CIMA art Gallery in her one person show in the year 1995. This was an oil painting, where she used plenty of motifs form her daily experiences in linear/ contoured drawings or with flat/ silhouetted colours. She placed an image of a seated woman at the centre of the composition upon a lotus leaf. She is holding something (some unknown fruit or flower) in front of her genital organ or she opens up her vagina with her parallel placed hands to show the inner organs of the woman body, negating the so called *biologism* exercised in favour of femaleness by patriarchy. She represented a woman body as the image of a resistant. Arpita did not hesitate to open up the genital organs of a women

body with all its exuberance; her images never appear like the conventional nude women, painted under the aesthetic values of Romanticism or Modernism. She had purposefully denied such *lollypop art* and showed a woman with her real organs, with her real presence. Two women figures are placed at the upper corner of the canvas as supporting figures rendered in blue and raw umber tint. But the whole painting is composed with small motifs like vase, jug, pressure cooker, coffee mugs etc, in flat and silhouetted colours. Even she had drawn some linear motifs by scratching the flat red colour of the back ground. Such as, a table with vase, a chair, a flower vase, lotus leaf, hairs of the central figure, random letters such as *Loosing the Memory/I thought would keep* etc. The most interesting motif she used here is a tiny toy like aero plane which is a metaphor of a flight to somewhere unknown. She draws another small aero plane even at the centre of the forehead of the woman figure that must define some idea of freedom: perhaps this is freedom from the claustrophobic space that is commonly rooted in the construction of the beauty and body of a woman. Now there is no doubt that these motifs are not treated as mere ornamentation; they are representing individual signs with different metaphors. The question is how Arpita has used these motifs in her paintings? Through this painting it is clear that she experienced with the things of her surroundings and adjoined them in her painting in individual connotations to establish a link between the organic body (The women figures) and the non living subjects (the motifs).

It is important to discuss how the body of woman becomes the tool of cultural constructions indicating rigorous essentialism like femaleness, femininity, womanhood etc. Arpita thoroughly tried to project her women as an opposition to those cultural constructions and composed her paintings in the various subverted gestures against the so called vulnerability. If femininity is considered as a subject of cultural construct then it might prove the patriarchal control over the culture. Primarily, in the Third world countries, (especially the countries which were once colonies), the rulers had constructed their patriarchal identity through the hegemony of class of elite/rich people and sub-rulers like Zamindars and zotdars. There is some eternal example like *Sati*⁷ in Indian context. Colonized rulers had stopped the celebration of Sati not only by making a law but also they had injected

the virtue of *Satitwa* into the veins of Indian women through a class of elites who were the so-called cultural constrictor of Indian society. In this context Toril Moi told:

'But if, as suggested, we define feminism as a political position and femaleness as matter of biology, we are still confronted with the problem of how to define femininity."A set of culturally defined characteristics" or a "cultural construct" may sound irritatingly vague to many. It would say that any content could be poured into this container; it does not read like a "proper" definition. The question is, however, whether it is desirable for feminists to try to fix the meaning of femininity at all. Patriarchy has developed a whole series of "feminine" characteristics (sweetness, modesty, subservience, humility etc.). Should feminists then really try to develop another set of "feminine" virtues, however desirable? And even if we did want to define femininity normatively, would it then not just become a part of the metaphysical binary oppositions Helen Cixous rightly criticises?' (Moi, 1997, p.109)

Another set of feminine virtues, could be more problematic than the previous one. Because it will then discriminate one classes of women from other and will create only the difference of normative. So the word femaleness should be deliberately taken with femininity, as they are the opposite sides of same coin. It could be understandable from Toril Mois thoughts,

'There is also a danger of turning a positive, feminist definition of femininity into definition of femaleness, and thereby falling back into another patriarchal trap. Gratifying though it is to be told that women really are strong, integrated, peace-loving, nurturing and creative beings, this all those women who do not want to play the role of Earth Mother. It is after all patriarchy, plethora of new virtues is no less essentialist than the old ones, and no less oppressive to not feminism, which has always believed in a true female/feminine nature: the biologism and essentialism which lurk behind the desire to bestow feminine virtues on all female bodies necessarily plays into the hands of the patriarchs.' (Moi, 1997, p.109)

It is basically a trap dug by patriarchy to shift female identity to some essential positions. After 1960's women issues were voiced politically, against the monolithic cultural elements, like language, image, meaning, and representation and the delicate issues of cultural oppression or

discrimination were also pointed out. Therefore feminism seems to be defined as a political position and femaleness would be defined as a matter of biology. But the femaleness that is the biology of a woman has been trapped by the so called appraisal of patriarchy to create a synonymous meaning between femaleness and femininity, not in sense of biology but in the essences of virtues.

Two other paintings can be taken as the example for the same. *'Blue Cherries'* (1995) exhibited in the above mentioned exhibition held in CIMA Gallery in 1995, is also composed with a woman figure as the central image of resistance. Her bust figure is in a seated pose (either in a chair or in a stool) keeping her hand upon a table and the table is fully covered with blue cherries. A man behind the woman figure drawn under a bulb, is targeting the woman with a gun/pistol. Arpita painted the woman, in a mood of reluctance from the whole situation i.e. what was happening in the canvas. She turned her face from the man ignoring the stereotypes of patriarchal threat and eventually her image became resistant through a silent and reluctant mood.

The painting *'The Cornflower Bed'* (pl. 50) (1995) exhibited in same exhibition is also an important work with typical gestures and motifs of Arpita. She painted a cornflower field with the motifs of blue cornflowers and at the top right side corner of the painting a woman is composed in a reclining gesture, rested her head on the white pillow. Two male figures painted in the foreground; one is draped in sports wear and running with a ball and other is riding a motorcycle upon the cornflower field. The woman figure is bare against the fully draped male figures which, as a common feature of artists paintings, becomes a continuous (by repeated the representation of same character) threat to the civil society. The most interesting feature of these two paintings is the use of Bluish-violet round motifs. These motifs are common in both the paintings but the artist deliberately used these motifs in two different signifiers or connotations. In the painting *'Blue Cherries'* (pl. 51) Arpita had used this motif in the metaphor of Cherries with an interpretation of softness and elegance of a matter that could be challenged by a pistol. In the other painting, *'The Cornflower Bed'*, she had also used this motif in the metaphor of cornflower with other interpretation. Here cornflowers became a bed of a woman with

her personal attachment, which signified with a pillow and this very personal and cozy cornflower bed is being invaded here by two masculine powers with their typical tools like ball and bike. The different metaphors of a same motif changed the total ambience of the compositions and created a mode of transmission of the artist's inner self from one painting to other. This was once explained by Arpita:

'There is another thing. There is always a self-referential element in any new work that I do. I always refer to something from the last work. Take, for example, the blue cherry which I used as a motif in the painting of a seated female figure with a man holding a pistol in the background. I was intrigued with the form a pair of cherry earrings that I had seen and had made a charcoal drawing of a prone figure surrounded with these globular forms. Subsequently, I did a painting called Cornflower Bed where the blue cherries were transformed into blue flowers with the prone figure on them.' (Datta, 1995, Arpita Singh Catalogue)

The transformation of motifs from one painting to other is an interesting characteristic of Arpita's individual style. Arpita transforms her images, scripts, dialogues and the fragmented narratives from one canvas to other canvas with full conscious attention and choice of the elements. She used to choose motifs from the elements of her practical experiences as signifiers in different connotations and juxtaposed them with the central character or figure (as signified) to create a discourse of the eclectic signs.

3.4. *A Woman and A Woman'*: The Celebration of Sisterhood

In the paintings of 90's decade Arpita had chosen an intimate subject as her work i.e. 'mother and daughter'. She had tried to execute the intimate relationship of two generation of women with the fascinating flavour of sisterhood. One of the paintings from this series called, *My Daughter* (1995) was analyzed by Geeta Kapur. She said:

'In the gesture of the mature woman holding a girl-child who is already herself a woman, the goddess is actually transcended. Revived from private oblivion, held by her fierce and benign mother, the daughter grows up, she faces life, she endures.' (Kapur, 2000, p. 50)

Ella Dutta in her articles titled “Of History, Context and Location: Paintings by Arpita Singh”, observed as follows:

'A few years earlier, during the release of her sketchbook, artist A.Ramanchandran had said that Arpita's images were primarily dominated by two identities- the mother and the daughter. Perhaps, a third identity could also be added- that of a dreamer, a woman given to visions.'(Datta, 2006, p.2)

'*A Woman And A Woman*' (pl. 52) (1995) a painting by Arpita in oil on canvas was also based upon the same subject and executed at CIMA art gallery in 1995. The whole background of the composition is hued in blue tint and a big red chair is placed at the centre of the canvas. A woman is sitting over the chair and a small yellow woman image is placed upon the lap of that huge and seated woman image. The right margin of the composition is painted with aero plane motifs, which is again used as the sign of flight from the ground level. Perhaps these two women figures are signifying the image of mother and daughter. The smaller figure is tiny but drawn in a physic of an adult woman, not like a girl child. The painting shows an intimate bodily attachment of two fascinating women who may be different in age or generation but have a exquisite biological link. This link is one of the important factors of Arpita's painting. This is what she carried out from one canvas to another and termed this continuity as an activity of transmission or transformation. She told. 'Since 1993, I find that I am increasingly painting a woman and another. I have been painting mother and daughter figures. One reason for this bent in my work is that I believe life progresses from woman to woman. | (Dutta, 1996, Catalogue)

Though Arpita adopted elements from her child hood in her works but she never consciously represented her own image as a girl. In case of mother and daughter series she always restricted her image as mother, she shares her feelings as mother to her daughter; but she never represented herself in the image as a daughter. In this context a question was asked by Ella Dutta, Arpita's response was like this:

'ED: We have talked about the women figures in your work, the mother-and-daughter theme. We know that you have often used your mother in your paintings. Would you like to comment on this?'

Arpita answered,

'My daughter and I are very close friends and we share a close bond. I cannot say that I share the same friendship with my mother or we are that close. But I have a strong awareness that she is connected to me in an inexplicable way. There is something else that is happening to me. Maybe the occurrences are accidental or coincidence but there are times that I am left with a sense of premonition. I work on a painting and suddenly the image foretells a coming event. Like the painting in which I have used the seated figure of my daughter with a line from a poem of Octavio Paz which talks of a passage. It was after I had finished the painting that I learnt that my daughter was planning to get married.'(Datta, 1996, Catalogue Arpita Singh)

In the 1st decade of 21st century Arpita's paintings gradually became more intense and vibrant. The important elements of her works, such as scribbling, letters, motifs, and strong contoured lines remain the same. But they were represented more clearly and elementarily than the previous works. In the earlier works she tried to smudge and dissolve the forms along with the other forms of the background of the painting to create an effect of chaotic rudimentary sequence in her composition. But from the beginning of this century, she had tried to build her pictures more schematically than the before. Though the feelings of spontaneous lines and forms remain unchanged the clarity of forms and shapes becomes more prominent.

Arpita visually translated a new dialogue through myth and history under contemporary context. She started a series of paintings based upon *Mahabharata*, which could be the best examples of her new language of painting. She used today's man/woman in today's dress to re-represent the epic in the contemporary context. The paintings like '*Whatever is Here*' or '*Thirty Six Clouds: Yudhishtira Approaching Heaven*' are the typical examples of her series of paintings.

The painting '*Thirty Six Clouds: Yudhishtira Approaching Heaven*' (pl. 53) (2005) is also a critique of the epic of man-centered heroism.. Here *Yudhishtira* the eldest *Pandava* is riding upon an aeroplane and gliding upon the '36' clouded sky as if in a mood of leisure trip. Three angels are coming to receive him and a dog behind *Yudhishtira* symbolizing as '*Dharma*'. Among five figures painted at the lower frame of the canvas, one

is perhaps mother *Kunti* and the others are the four younger brother of *Yudhishtira*, marked with A, B, C, D, E codes. Two sides of the painting are framed with a bordering space where Arpita painted the miniature images of the duties from the rituals of 'Vrats' of Bengal, which is a unique characteristic of Arpita's work. The epic image of *Yudhishtira* is converted into the look of contemporary corporate image of man and executed typically like a masculine images of her other works. *Yudhishtira* here draped with a white trouser, black shirt and polished black shoe. Through this Arpita seems to show a metonymy of epic Heroes in context to contemporary heroism of corporate world

Arpita also began to use map like diagram in her works from the beginning of this century, such as, '*My Lollypop City: Gemini Rising*' (pl. 54) (2008), '*The Kings Way*' (pl. 55) (2004) etc. Especially in the painting '*My Lollypop City: Gemini Rising*' she used pink and mauve map against a sky-blue background. She also used her familiar motifs like aero planes, clouds, cars, buses, and tiny figures along with the popular monuments of the capital-city New Delhi, such as, Jantar Mantar, parliament house etc. These motifs and figures are represented more clearly than her earlier works. She used to represent a typical dress code for man and woman, i.e. a white suit with a black coat and a white sari respectively. This dress code has been repeatedly used in different works of Arpita in the present decade. The letterings and graphic element became more distinct with their narrative values. She was highly inspired by the hoardings, signboards, leaflets and newspapers to create an effect of reproductive imagery. The best example of map, myth, history and narrative (letterings) is conjugated in one of her large painting, '*Whatever is Here*', which is already discussed in this chapter.

The most important theme of Arpita's painting,- 'woman' became more resistant in the present decade. Her own individual approach in imaging woman in a non-feminine look is eventually visualized under the notion of gender difference. Previously she used to paint the women figures within a personal space, where they are virtually alienated from the patriarchal norms and social taboos. But in the present century her women images became more vibrant and they were executed in a manner of direct threat to the society of men. These women images put an oppositional character

against the patriarchal representatives that certainly brought many critical thoughts on feminism, which Ella Dutta explained:

'In her earlier works, the artist seemed to be a little girl or a brooding woman negotiating an incomprehensible world by juxtaposing innocent childhood memories and familiar domestic paraphernalia with menacing forms and figures. In her recent works, she appears to have come to terms with that world and is managing to establish her control over it. She is stepping out of her domestic interiors and engaging with a larger arena of life.' (Datta, 2006, p. 10/12)

Arpita painted '*Security Check*' (pl. 56) (2003) with watercolour in paper. Here there is a bare body of a woman as a sign critiquing the term 'security check'. In the foreground of the painting Arpita not only painted a woman with bare skin, but she also tried to show the inner organs of the body through the surface of the bare skin, such as the ribs and a womb carrying a mature fetus. A lady behind the composition is wearing a white Shari and red blouse may also be the image of the same woman who was placed in security check a moment before. Arpita painted rows of silhouetted figures in the impression of the security guards who are representatives of the rule and power. Arpita showed the woman unclothed at the foreground in a hands-up gesture, - the gesture common during security checking and frisking. But it is also showing an act of surrender to the power. Or Arpita had deliberately executed an encounter through the upraised hand of the woman and simultaneously encountered her insecurity. Apparently this security check event is a highly important and responsible matter for the protection/existence of the state; but simultaneously it also unclothed the personal identity of the common individual in the name of security. And when it invades the personal space of women, it became more penetrative to make them different/other and vulnerable.

Arpita had tried to touch this sensitive problematic that innocently invades upon the women's space and differentiate women by the practice of binary opposition. Binary opposition is a system that emerges from the meanings and thoughts of *Logo-centrism*, which interprets all oppositional pairs as couples. Helen Cixous⁸ a French writer and critique, Director of the centre d'Etudes Feminines at the University of Paris VII, has noticed some important interrelations among, hierarchy, man/womam, passivity/activity etc

in the arena of binary opposition and put her queries in the essay 'Stories: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays':

'Where is she?

Activity/passivity

Sun/Moon

Culture/Nature

Day/Night

Father/Mother

Head/Heart

Intelligible/Palpable

Logos/Pathos

Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress.

Matter, concave, ground –where steps are taken, holding- and dumping-ground.

Man

Woman

Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it carries us, beneath all its figures, wherever discourse is organised. If we read or speak, the same thread or double braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection. Thought has always worked through opposition.

Speaking/Writing

Parole/Ecriture

High/Low

Through dual, hierarchical oppositions. Superior/Inferior. Myths, legends, books. Philosophical systems. Everywhere (where) ordering intervenes, where a law organizes what is thinkable by oppositions (dual, irreconcilable; or sublatale, dialectical). And all these pairs of oppositions are couples. Does that mean something? Is the fact that Logo centrism subjects thought – all concepts, codes, and values- to a binary system, related to 'the' couple, man/woman?

Nature/History

Nature/Art

Nature/Mind

Passion/Action

Theory of culture, theory of society, symbolic systems in general - art, religion, family, language - it is all developed while bringing the same schemes to light. And the movement whereby each opposition is set up to make sense is the movement through which the couple is destroyed. A universal battlefield. Each time, a war is let loose. Death is always at work.

Father/Son Relations of authority, privilege, force.

The Word/Writing Relations: opposition, conflict, sublation, return.

Master/Slave Violence. Repression

We see that victory always comes down to the same thing: things get hierarchical. Organization by hierarchy makes all conceptual organization subject to man. Male privilege, shown in the opposition between activity and passivity, he uses to sustain himself. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity.' (Cixous. H.1997 (2nd edi) P-91/92)

The sexual difference can be considered as the root of culturally constructed differences between man and woman. The word difference⁹ first indicated by Ferdinand de Saussure with a separate connotation; he proposed that any word has no inherent meaning but becomes meaningful through the difference with other words. Later this notion of difference was taken by Jacques Derrida to establish the discourse on binary opposition. In the paintings of Arpita the concept of sexual difference is consciously adopted to show the binary opposition in relation with the couple as man/woman. As an example of her painting, '*To Shekhawati by Road*' (2004) could be taken in the discussion of sexual difference.

In the Ultramarine tinted canvas of '*To Shekhawati by Road*' (pl. 57) Arpita had painted her central woman character at the centre of the composition, rendered with Raw-umber hue. Numerous black cars are painted at random in the canvas in various directions. Three other figures (one woman and two men) are standing/sitting behind the horizontally placed central woman figure. The central figure of the woman is as usually imaged with inner skeleton structure transparently viewed through her bared skin' which is a common character of Arpita's painting. Now some questions could come in respect of this work, i.e. where the difference or what is the opposition? And where is the dominance of patriarchal notion of femininity? It is

comfortable to start answering from the last question. The answer could be sought in the following critical observation of Ella Dutta:

'One of the water colours with a woman lying across the surface is a very significant work in Arpira's oeuvre. It expresses her philosophy of man's relationship with nature and nurture, with the physical world and its history. The woman lying on her side has her ribs and vertebrae exposed...' (Datta, 2006, p. 8)

What was Ella Dutta's intention when she says 'man's relationship with nature and nurture...'? Did she want to mean only the relation between man and nature, where women are excluded or she meant women and man both by a single patriarchal voice i.e. 'the man'. Perhaps this is the beginning point to dig the pitfall for women by patriarchy, which gradually followed by the concept of difference. Again Ella Datta told:

'In the watercolor already mentioned, the woman lying on the ground could be the embodiment of nature, the figure of mother earth. There is a tree behind her with blue flowers that seems to be growing out of her and it is like the tree of life with its roots and spreading canopy of branches. The lying woman and the tree are witness of the endless theatre of life of birth, sexuality, renunciation and then negation. Is the woman a witness or is she like a great goddess dreaming such illusory scenes.' (Datta, 2006, p. 10)

This critical vision of the woman is an endless story from the beginning of 'Art History'. How long Art History will continue to analyze women image in the notion of sexually titillating or her image as a matter of reproduction. It is generally noticed that if any women figure is not represented with usual Classical, Hellenistic, Romantic or Victorian look and if the woman figure is having a healthy feature (not as per the norms of the beauty construction) with heavy breast and abdomens then she should be canonized as the figure of *Mother Goddess*, which is an icon of fertility or a fetish figure typically defined by the History of Art. It seems that Arpita Singh has deliberately input some contrast features between man and woman images to create the difference consciously within the same space. She purposefully painted the lying woman (in the painting '*To Shekhawati by Road*') with the bare body against the well draped men figures to propagate the biological insecurity of a culturally ruined society. Here she also painted a woman figure wearing only a pink bra that is the image which appropriates an exact

gaze of men contesting the myth of beauty/body. This conscious execution of sexual difference always plays a role as anti-power in her works. Through her works Arpita also negated the practice of phallogocentrism by exhibiting women as the source of power and energy. She has also introduced a new visual language for women through her canvases, by which her woman becomes the image of resistance against all probable causes of binary oppositions where phallogocentrism¹⁰ endlessly strangling the voice of women.

Arpita has developed a new and individual style through her drawings. Her drawings are also having the resistant character with all her intimate feelings as a woman. In reference to her '*Drawing 2003*', she wrote only one word 'bride' in multiple rows surrounding the major figure of a woman. The woman is only draped with a bra and that bra becomes a butterfly. The skin of the woman image is not smooth and her body is not trimmed with the vital therapies of beauty, which again becomes a resistance against all kind of patriarchal gaze i.e. beauty, aging etc. Aging is one of the important constructions of patriarchy to create the discrimination between young and old women.

In another work, *Drawing (2003)*, Arpita showed an aged woman is running through the sandy beach beside a sea. Her inner organs are visible through the bare skin. She shows the womb at the abdominal portion, which is transfused into the shape of a blooming flower to convey a cognation of beauty of aging. One thing is very clear that Arpita is not authentic about her signature in the drawings. She is used to inscribe her signature according to linear demand of the drawing and places them as if it is an element of composition. (See other Drawings, pl. 48)

Arpita had painted a series of painting titled *Short Stories I, II, III, IV* etc, onwards 2006. She had painted this series with her intimate vision of personal mind and tried to pick the situational fillings of some subconscious thoughts. These paintings are also carrying the resistant feature of women with artist's individual style and intimate feelings. The painting, *Short Stories IX* (pl.) could be taken as an example, where she showed the story of a particular day when the planet Mars became bigger and came nearer to earth. The starry red Mars and the pink desert (she used a metaphor of

camel to show the desert) in the background of the painting made a somber ambience at the first glance. But at the foreground when she painted a bare woman is lying on the ground with her head rested upon a floral pillow then it certainly subverts the poetry of the dreamy pink that always symbolizes the colour of femininity. This figure is not similar to the *'To Shekhawati by Road'*, rather here the woman is more relaxed and looking high to the sky with an astronomical attachment to the red planet Mars. This very relaxed posture is portraying an image, which is not bothered about any insecurity or patriarchal intervention and she is not at all surfaced or vulnerable. After 80's, the feelings of personal space of woman again hold a strong position in Arpita's works in the first decade of 20th century through these series of Short Stories, such as *'Short Stories IV'* (pl. 58), *'Short Stories VI'* (pl. 59) etc.

Some other examples could be taken from the 'Short Stories' (2006) series for further discussion. *'Short Stories III'* (pl. 60) and *'Short Storeis XI'* (pl. 61), these two paintings could be taken as the perfect examples against the stereotyped male gazes. In both the paintings Arpita showed a monolithic feature of man at the left corner almost in the same representation. At the top right corner an unclothed woman is also painted in both the paintings. In the painting short stories III, the man is shown in a so-called timid look with an archetypal feature like 'Mahenjodaro Priest Head (Bearded Bust)'. A wheel is used as a motif in between two figures and other scribbling, letterings and motifs are also used to create woman's own individual space. Here the woman is featured in the profile view to carry a mood of reluctance about the gazes of men and indifference from the whole situation. In the painting *'Short Stories XI'* again Arpita placed the man and woman figure in the same place a like 'Short Stories III', but here the man is not so timid like the previous one. Here the man has arrived with his all chauvinism in an attacking gesture with a gun. The gun could be a symbol of phallus, the dominant metaphor in sexual deference. The background of the whole painting is scribbled like a play board of snake and ladder, which again playfully ignored the serious invention of patriarchy, armed with a gun/phallus.

Sexual opposition is closely attached with a value judgment obtained by patriarchy and the value is commonly generated by the practice of

hierarchical preferences. There is always a man who is more dominant than a woman in any kind of sexual discourse and there is always a man who can show his gun/paths as a weapon' whereas women are always bared even if they are virtually draped. Toril Moi observed:

'...These binary oppositions are heavily imbricated in the patriarchal value system: each opposition can be analysed as a hierarchy where the 'feminine' side is always seen as the negative, power-less instance. The biological opposition male/female, in other words, is used to construct a series of negative 'feminine' values which then are imposed on and confused with the 'female'. (Moi, 1997, p. 110)

The confusion of female and femininity is clearly demarcated by Arpita Singh in many of her paintings among which the painting *'Short Stories II'* (pl. 62) is a suitable example, where she wrote a line at the top area of the composition like a heading of the painting:

'WHY I ALWAYS MAKE WRONG MAPS'
(Why I always make wrong maps).

In contrast to *Short Stories XI*, where the woman is apparently cornered and collapsed against the power of the gun-man, in *short stories II* Arpita had raised a resistance through only one pink hand that stretched out at the right corner of foreground of the painting. A pink large hand with fully opened fingers is an instance of resistance against the obstinate guns of three gun-men. Even the headline is showing a subversive nature against the system of power by denying the right execution of the state constructed map; wrong map always counters the capitalist power of state/nation to break the construction of the system territory. Therefore Arpita's work could not only be viewed in a feminist perception. But it also enhances the postcolonial thoughts through a deep sensation of marginality. In this context Toril Moi referred Julia Kristeva's¹¹ view:

'And how can we continue our political struggle if we first have to deconstruct our own basic assumption of an opposition between male power and female submission? One way of answering these questions is to look at the French-Bulgarian linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's considerations on the question of femininity. Flatly refusing to define

'femininity', she prefers to see it as a 'position'. If femininity then can be said to have a definition at all in Kristevan terms, it is simply as 'that which is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order'. This relational 'definition' is as shifting as the various forms of patriarchy itself, and allows her to argue that men can also be constructed as marginal to the symbolic order as her analyses of male avant-grade artists (Joyce, Celine, Artaud, Mallarme, Lautreamont) have shown.

...If, as Cixous has shown, femininity is defined as lack, negativity, absence of meaning, irrationality, chaos, darkness – in short, as non-Being - Kristeva's emphasis on marginality allows us to view this repression of the feminine in terms of 'positionality' rather than of essences. What is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies.' (Moi T. 1997. P-111/112)

Arpita perhaps consciously felt the marginalized position of women, because she herself termed it as vulnerable that signifies a position, which is synonymous to the situation like cornered or surfaced. As a woman artist Arpita deeply understood this position and told:

'... my friend Nilima Sheikh says, that the woman undraped has surfaced. I think these women are vulnerable. It is the last stance when you are cornered and no escape routes are left. You have to face up to what comes.' (Dutta, 1996, Catalogue)

This vulnerable position is the turning point of the resistance of a woman; from where she can counter any attack and fight back any invasion, because she is bared and she has nothing to lose. Hence the images of women in Arpita's paintings are not dyed in stereotypes of beauty-myth; they emerge from their own identity that may be unconventional like the fragmented 'Wrong Maps'.

Notes: Chapter III

¹ . See, Sarojit Datta's article on *Patachitra* 'The Panorama of Patachitra'. (Datta, 1993, p.11)

². In the discussion on folk art , Alpana , and Vrata Sarojit Datta told: 'The Painters of the first Category are mostly women. They paint auspicious symbols in connection with ritualistic function or the Vratas. The rites and the rituals connected with these Vratas are of magical significance. Some of these are performed even today for protection, prosperity, and happiness. Obviously therefore, the contents of art have not undergone serious alteration with the passage of time. But instances are not too infrequent where one can see definite evidence of painters taking delight in reproducing objects or motifs. His consideration in such cases is obviously aesthetic rather than symbolic.' (Datta, 1993, p.7)

³ . Body: Theories about the sexuality of the body, power and the political control of women's bodies by patriarchy, are central to feminism.

In contemporary society a woman is usually represented only as the body. Accurate information about the body is withheld from the women and our body is regarded in functional terms. Kristeva argues that, if women came to power the rerepresentation of power as opposition to the body would cease. She claims that a woman's body is 'unrepresentable' power. See Kristeva (1974). (Humm, 2003, p. 26-27).

⁴ . Ashish Khetan told in the article 'A cold Eclipse', that: 'There was no spontaneity to what happened in Gujarat post- Godhra. This was no uncontrived, unplanned, unprompted communal violence. This was a pogrom. This was genocide.' (Khetan, Nov 03, 2002).

See also, (Dasgupta, Mar 02, 2002, Front Page).

⁵ . Sandhya Bordewekar told in the article titled 'Twelve Men and a Short-lived Idea', that: Probably, only a few contemporary Indian artists have heard of Group 1890, or are aware of what it stood for. This is unfortunate because Group 1890

was, perhaps, one of the earliest serious efforts among Indian artists to question prevalent art practices and formulate a new approach to art-making...

The Bhavnagar meeting had been the outcome of prolonged discussions over a period of two years. Finally, "having come to a common understanding regarding the vitiating influences which hinder the unfolding of authentic development in art, it was decided to launch the Group 1890 movement". (Bordewekar, 2011, p. 32-33)

⁶ . Toril Moi, the professor of Literature and Romance studies in Duke University and a writer of critical theory.

⁷ . In the book Sati V.N. Datta explained Suttee: 'The word *sati* in Sanskrit is a feminine noun meaning a good woman, a true wife but when applied to the widow, it means a woman who sacrifices herself on the funeral pyre for the love of her husband. Suttee is of two types, *sahagamana* or keeping company (*sahamarana*, dying together) or *anumarana*, dying without the dead body i.e. when a woman burns herself with garments, slippers, walking stick or with some relic of the deceased.' (Datta, 1988, p.1)

⁸ . Helen Cixous a French writer and critique, Director of the centre d'Etudes Feminines at the University of Paris VII,

⁹ .See, Calhoun Craig's article 'Cultural Difference and historical Specificity'.(Calhoun, 1995, p. 73)

¹⁰ . 'A condensation of PHALLOCENTRISM and LOGOCENTRISM coined by DERRIDA (1975) to describe how LACAN perpetuates the traditional philosophical view that the word or logos is the site of truth by making the PHALLUS the key signifier that both governs access to the SYMBOLIC, or language, and determines sexual difference.' (Macey, 2000, p. 296)

¹¹ . Julia Kristeva is a practicing psychoanalyst and also teaches at the University of Paris VII and a writer of critical theory.
