Chapter -1

Introduction & Life Sketch of M.F. Husain & Anjolie Ela Menon’s
INTRODUCTION

M.F. Husain's (b. 1915) education, either academic or art, was minimal, he came from a lower middle class family of Indore. He secured a gold medal in an art exhibition in 1932, studied for a little while under Bendre at the Indore State Art School, and a little later, for a short time, he was at the J. J. School, Bombay. In 1937, he migrated to Bombay, and settled down into a hard life as a signboard and hoarding painter. From 1941 to 1948, he worked in at furniture and toy shop. He participated in a group show of the Progressive Artists in 1947, was admitted as a member of the PAG in 1948, accepted F. N. Souza as his mentor, and visited Delhi with him to see an exhibition of the Mathura sculptures in the Presidential Palace.

From 1948, he became a professional easel painter, and after the emigration of Souza to London in 1949, he held his first one-man show in 1950. He won an award at the Venice Biennale in 1954, at the first Lalit Kala Exhibition in 1955, at the Tokyo Biennale in 1959, all three for his paintings, and for his documentary film made in Rajasthan entitled Through the Eyes of a Painter, he won an award for short films at the Berlin Film Festival of 1967. A retrospective exhibition of his works was held in Bombay in 1969. He was awarded a Padmashri by the Government of India in 1966 and was further elevated to Padmabhushan in 1973.
His career as a member of Indira Gandhi's coterie will be reviewed in the last chapter of this work, in the section entitled "The Emergency and the Arts."

Apart from the minor influence of academism through the art schools of Inaore and Bombay, and through his reading of Ruskin\(^1\), the major early influences on his work were those that reached him through the cinema and through the wood craft-shop. He was an avid film fan and tried to recapture screen images of figures in action in his sketch books. Experience in the toy and furniture making establishment made him re-interpret the human figure in terms of stiff cubistic mechanical movements. His association with the PAG was short-lived. As the group broke up in the early fifties with many members of the Bombay contingent emigrating to the West. He was powerfully affected by the view of Mathura sculpture in Ddhi and by the hybrid French Academic and Ajanta Academic works of Amrita Sher-Gil. Whilst with the Progressivists, he moved forward to learn from German-Expressionism, he also went backwards, as compared to A. Slier-Gil, to the Symbolist Movement which had preceded the Post-Impressionist and Fauvist phase in Parisian art.\(^2\)

We need not single out for citing the colour reproductions in the case of Husain, since a very large number of them are easily available for reference in Shiv Kapur's Husain, 1961, in the L.K.A. Series; in A.S. Peer-boy's Paintings of Husain, 1955; and in Bartholomew and Kapur's Husain, undated but of around 1971 once again the universal characteristic of compradors art strikes us

\(^1\) Kapur and Bartholomew, op. p.22.

\(^2\) Ibid. pp. 21, 27, 32, 41-51.
that of time lessens. After a period of initial grouping, reflected most clearly in
the use of muddy colours, and the end of which may be placed around 1950,
there has Deen no real development in Husain's art. The Banana Seller of 1951 is
essentially the same as Moonlanding of 1969, or Unframsd Violet of 1968.
His Zameen and Indian Village of 1955, are repeated in the Mural for World
Narayanan of 1968 is the same as the veena player of the Green Song or the
Ragamalika of 1960. The Blue Night, 1959, Fatima, 1960, Tulsi, 1.961,
Dhoban, 1963, Hajera, 1964, go on repeating themselves and are no different
from the royal portraits ofJawaharia! Nehru of 1964.

But unlike the artists of the last fifteen years, for the sociological reasons
which we have noted, Husain's work retains its unmistakable Indian character.
We have earlier noticed the same feature in the works of A. Slier-Gil and N.S.
Bendre. The last mentioned even, tried abstractionism, for a little while after
1958, but being a child of the thirties and forties, he was not happy with that
style and had to revert back to his earlier Indiaaness. Husain, it must be said to
his credit, never wavered and stuck to the personal idiom he had evolved in
1951-56, right through the stridently clamorous years of bureaucratic
compradorism which followed from. 1967.

As with A. Slier-Gil and N. S. Bendre, M. F. Husain's paintings too
possess a great deal of charm. There is a naivete and simplicity about his work
that is fetching. The erotic Stalinism of the Progressivists has left its mark upon

3. Reproduced in Peerbhoy and wrongly attributed to 1952.
him, and his usual symbols the Lamp, the Cactus and the Rearing Horse or Bull are loudly phallic. His Arjuna of 1962 and Duldul Horse and the Horse That Looked Back of 1967 are 'spirited, though The Sun Pursued by Horses of 1966 and The Fury of 1963 show the dangers of exaggerated and theatrical passion. In our opinion, Husain's best work is built up around the female figure as in Assia, Jhoola and Tulsi of 1961, Nathani of 1962, Fatima of 1960, Blue Night of 1959, all related to the 1956 study, Bet-ween the Spider and the Lamp, and the 1951 Banana Seller. The more ambitious large canvases or murals trying to present a conspectus of village life are superficial touristic impressions that betray the paucity of the artist's intellectual equipment as well as his lack of contact with real village life.

**Anjolie Ela Menon** was born in 1940 in India of mixed Bengal and American parentage. She went to school in Lovedale in the Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu and thereafter had a brief spell at the JJ. School of art in Bombay. Subsequently she earned a degree of English Literature from Delhi University.

After holding also Exhibitions in Bombay and Delhi in late 1950s as a teenager, Menon worked and studied in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1961-62 on a French Government scholarship. Before returning home, she traveled extensively in Europe and West Asia studying Romanesque and Byzantine art. Since then she has lived and worked in India, in England, the U.S.A., Germany and the erstwhile USSR. She had over thirty solo shows
including at Black heath Gallery-London, Gallery Radicke-Bonn. Winston Gallery-Washington, Doma Khudozhinkov-USSR, Rabindra Bhavanand Shridharani Gallery-New Delhi, Academy of Fine Arts-Calcutta, the Gallery Madras, Jehangir Gallery, Chemoud Gallery, Taj Gallery, Bombay and Maya Gallery at the Museum Annexe. Hong Kong. A retrospective exhibition was held in 1988 in Bombay, Menon has participated in several international or shows in France, Japan, Russia and U.S.A.

In addition to paintings in private and corporate collections, her works have been acquired by museums in India and abroad. She is also a well-known muralist and has represented India at the Algiers Biennale, the Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil and three triennials in New Delhi. She has been invited by the British Council, the U.S. State Department and the French Ministry of Culture to confer with leading artists in those countries. Menon served on the advisory committee and the art purchase committee of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, where she was co-curator with Henri Claude Cousseau for a major exhibition of French Contemporary Art in 1996. Her work recently went under the hammer at the Christie's and Sotheby's auctions of Contemporary Indian Art in London. A book titled "ANJOLIE ELA. MENON:

Paintings in private collections has been published on her life and work Menon lives and works in Delhi.

It's a reflection of a five-decade career interspersed with experimentation that paved way for trends. "Back in 1960, as a student in
Atelier Fresque, Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris, when everyone was embracing modernism I did the maverick thing of being inspired by 15th century Christian art!" she recalls. In 2000, she was the first Indian artist to work with computers. While the Indian preview was received with scepticism, it was a hit in New York. For this she took help from her software engineer son Aditya - his son Veer is a computer geek. "He persuaded me to enjoy technology and not get frightened by it, I am still bad at gadgets and can't even use my mobile properly, but I think the computer is a great tool. It can help you change colours in a flash and make a crow sitting on a chair fly off!" Menon has also resurrected junk and turned it into artifacts art you can sit on, or keep your jams and pickles in. "Art of retrieval is part of the Indian ethos; we do not belong to a throwaway society," says the artist, who also enjoyed a stint with kitsch, in a show titled Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai, a name inspired aptly by a Hindi movie hit from the time.

"Anjolie is savvy, has great imagination, has done bold experiments in the early 1990s with old Chettinad furniture and digital art," says Madhu Jain, art critic and curator of Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai. "Of late, however, she hasn't done much soul searching or pushed the envelope of creativity and taken new risks. She needs to go by her gut feeling more often. Her initial work had melancholy in it, but now it seems to come from her palette and not her heart." Mumbai-based Ranjit Hoskote, poet, author, art critic and curator of contemporary Indian art, feels few portray the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie as well as Menon does. Within the terms she sets for herself she's quite credible, in his view, "She is honest and there's no gulf between her stated intent and her work.
However, her work makes no claims on the viewer beyond the painterly and she does not invoke rhetoric to justify her work," says the critic who last year wrote a book on Jehangir Sabavala. Hoskote adds that most criticism that comes Menon's way pertains less to aesthetics, more to avarice about her price.

Typically, Menon is unperturbed. What matters to her currently, she says, is that she can effortlessly transform from grandmother to painter with a ladle in one hand and a brush in the other. Her day begins at 7 am, followed by pranayama and yoga and cooking lunch for her family. She works in the studio from 9 am to 2 pm, returning home to take charge of her grandchildren. Together, they draw, play fish, walk in the park, practice long jump and athletics. Though her diabetic foot restricts some of her prime-time activities with the kids, she likes her life peopled.

"My life is forever hectic," she says. Galleries call to enquire about her next painting, artists invite her to their shows, her students to their weddings, relatives come to stay over, and then there's shopping. "I haven't yet learnt to say 'no' to people," she says helplessly scanning her appointment diary. A couple of years ago, she even attended a three-day course to learn to say 'no' than being Shanghaied into doing things by other people all the time. It hasn't helped, though. The only place where the word comes easy is when someone tries to shift her furniture around, changing the way the house has been set for years. If sons Raja and Aditya, and their wives Vandana and Parveen, want to have it their way, they can do it in their space on the first floor.
Luckily, her family accepts her idiosyncrasies. "Perhaps my daughters-in-law would have expected a different sort of mother-in-law," quips Menon. Her doubts apart, Menon bonds well with her family. Every other weekend, they retire to their farmhouse in Haryana. But she never paints here. "Idyllic places like mountains paralyse me. I need the urban stimulus to work. Her muse is Mumbai Mohammad Ali Road, the rows of windows lining the street and the life behind them. Even in Delhi, Menon looks forward to her weekly nips to raucous INA market seeking fresh crab and fish for her kitchen and ideas for her canvas. "I am quite obsessed with flea markets, losing myself in Ooty's Toda Jewellery shop, or at Portobello Market on a Saturday if I'm in England."

France's open-air markets, selling hams, mushrooms and cheese, draw her as much as Pearl, an art shop in China Town in New York. With five floors of just art material, it's a pilgrimage for all artists. "I could drool looking at the papers, sprays, acrylics and canvases," she says, but for brushes she feels India is the best. "Maneka [Gandhi] claims they are squirrel hair, so all Indian brashes have gone underground. All our artists get them from a secret shop in Kolkata as it is impossible to paint with nylon brushes."

Whenever she goes there, Menon makes sure to visit her surgeon father Amarendra Krishna Deb's ancestral house in Shova Bazaar. Menon is restoring it with help from TNTACH. "It's a palatial house now occupied by over 30 families. It has verandas, big arches, paintings and some chandeliers that still haven't been looted," says Menon, wanting to bring back its lost glory. There are other things too to do, including spending time at the Divya Chhaya Trust, the
NGO she founded for poor children. The trust also runs a small school in Nizamuddin Basti where children study during the day, while their mothers learn sewing in the evening. “realize that throwing money isn’t good enough,” she says. I resolve to spend more time in the future because I know I could make a difference to the lives of some youngsters who need just that little extra encouragement.”
LIFE SKETCH OF M.F. HUSAIN

Ma, the unseen ma
She went away
Went
Away
Where

Cruelly, lovingly, inexplicable, she left no sign for her son to hold close to his heart, to cherish. Perhaps, she thought it more than enough, sufficient you know, to give birth to her son. That was enough, she must have smiled when her love for the child gulped its last breath.

Her eyes has welled over with tears on seeing her child stand jejunely in its father's shoes. She must have nursed so many dreams, so many aspirations for her son she packed them in to a parcel, taking hem away with her.

To date, whenever her son chances upon a Maharashtrian saree lying carelessly, he searches for her in the hundred pleasts of the saree. He imagines the face of the mother, so many dreams for her son must have drowned in her fathomless eyes. He long to open her heart in which she must have locked her child, never to let it go away from her, she would kiss the child on its temples, she would caress the child as if she were afraid of losing him.

Where are those lips? Where are those caresses? Where is her seamless love? Her purity? Where is the fountain the spring well, the gush, the lava of her love crusting from every pore? Perhaps.
The embers of her love remain unextinguished within her child today. He is restless, continues to look for her everywhere. But where, where?

He hopes that she will stop him as if nothing had ever happened and gather him in her arms. The weather, the distances, the barriers. None of these can obstruct him if only he could still retrieve her, belong to her, even if it is for a fraction of minute, a fraction of the remainder of his life. Only when he dies, will she die for him.

It is this undying ember of love that has seen him through the troughs and peaks. The child is what the mother is. Absurdly, on occasion, he wonders whether she is handing herself from him, so that she can still inspire him. She could be amidst the grand sculptures of the goddesses in the Ajanta caves. She could be as timeless as Mohenjodaro.

He has inscribed her name on the scalding sands of the Karbala. He has inquired of her from Nimrod Nefertiti. Maybe she is wandering in an unknown realm. Maybe she is there, in her absence, when he is in the presence of the Parian marble Venus de Milo, Michelangelo's Piela, Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa. He is sure she wouldn't have demurred before looking straight into the eyes of Pablo Picasso's Les Demoiselles D'Avignon in art, many painters have immortalised their mothers on canvas and paper yet the canvases are limned with mystery, with questions that are unanswerable. God created life, by snatching life away he created art,

Whistler painted a portrait of his mother, sitting silently in a corner of a room, dressed in the colour of night. Rembrandt painted a woman carrying a
lamp, she became the mother of his son. Van Gogh would have surely painted countless portraits of his mother seated in the golden, sun-blazing fields but philistines locked him in a lunatic cell.

Motherless Maqbool. Empty of the memory of her face. Perhaps it was a joke played on him by somebody up there, when he was one and a half years old, when he was just about to touch the outline of her presence. She died the child's eyes were robbed of the glimmer of his mother. The eyes could never seen her, feel her, love her.

The boy reminded M.F. Husain of their grandpa's room in Indore. The boy reminded him of the room which faced theirs. Under a roof, the brothers passionately rendered the story of Aala Udal which their blind mother placed before them after lighting the evening lamp.

Addressing his childhood, M.F. Husain said, "I am blessed. I can still see you distinctly even if you have kept your distance. It's been an age since we've talked of the good old days. I long to hold you close to my heart and remember how you used to be I long to rekindle the memories of Pandharpur, the mischievous moments of Indore. I long to return to grandpas corner shop where the ground must still be wet with the oil spilt from the lamps. I long to return to dada's room where you and I lived. Remember the window from where we began to recognize the outside world?

"My friend, my adolescence, we recognized many aspects of life, but we still knew very little of life. We did not know that grandpa was on the cusp of death when he was lying ever so still in bed. You were playing outside. The
rest of the family was grouped around the bed. Someone was reading the chapter of Yaasin from the scriptures someone was trying to force him to swallow a drop of pomegranate juice. Someone said his life is stuck in his throat, he wants to call out to Maqbool go get him immediately, and he must be playing around here or there. You were brought inside and the others were asked to leave dada's room.

As a tear goes by
The boy is silent
If he could have only said
Allah Haafiz

Boys Has A Blast, At His Father’s Wedding

Laal Khan was quite a character. A pencil wedged at the back of his right ear, his cheeks ballooning with paan, brandishing a measuring tape almost as if it were a machine gun, the tailor master stepped out of his shoes, agilely pushing the footwear to a corner outside the door, and chimed, where is the little prince? I have to take the measurements for his achkan.

When the boy shuffled in, Laal Khan cooed, “Oho, you must be six by now may Allah grant you a long life.”

Although his father was a time keeper the boy couldn't be confined within the dictates of time. Right now the boy was

\[1\] Page. No. 12,13,14,15-35.
thrilled because his father had assented to a second marriage. For the boy, the event meant a long train journey, his first. The train left Indore in the morning, halted at Ratlam, What fun! He wolfed down steaming hot puri bhaaji on the platform of Ratlam railway station. He was lulled to sleep by the mmmm music of the train speeding through the railway tracks.

On awakening, he saw the orange sun chasing the tram. He saw the green fields tossing and turning restlessly on nature's bed. He saw hills in the distance coming together and separating, he saw a gang of parrots camouflaging themselves amidst the tree branches. He saw the smoke of the steam engine rising and fading in the sky. The train stopped at siddhpur.

The boy's father, the groom, stepped out like some deadly dude onto the railway platform, Sharp in a white coat, shirt and trousers, he slickly straightened the tassles on his Turkish topi and embraced his impending father-in-law with super savoir faire. The boy also adjusted his Turkish topi stylishly but didn't let go of his grandfather's finger.

Even today, the scene in (father's bridal chamber unspools like a reel of film in the boy's mind. Be it the flowered chamber where the bride's sisters and friends were teasing and taunting the young woman and her groom. The tormentors broke into a medley of ribald songs, then they initiated the ticklish game of Ekka bekki. The bride hid tamarind seeds in her fists, a seed in one fist and two in the other. The groom had to force open either fist, the clincher being that his nails should not graze or nick the henna-patterned palm of the bride. If they did, the secret of her chastity would be revealed for all to see.
No glitch, no hitch. The wedding ceremony went off smoothly. It was a ceremony in white, The arrangements and the decor had a twist of sobriety. The groom wore a white achkan. The cotton mats for the festive dinner were white. The priest's headgear was white, ditto his beard. The sleep of childhood is, indeed, so deep that the boy missed the mounting darkness of the night, He saw blazing lights and more lights, a melee of all colours and an incandescent inner glow. The boy had a blast, he was delirious with happiness at his father's wedding.

The engine whistled sweetly like a self-absorbed bulbul, The train, with one of its compartments festooned with jasmines, left Siddhpur station. The boy no longer cared to feast his eyes on the zip-zapping moon, the sun, the villages and the desolate stretches from the compartment's grilled window. His eyes rested on the inert bride's alabaster hands and her feet peeping out of the folds of her blood-red wedding gown. Ho saw her big-big eyes burdened with the weight of sloop. Her face was cast shyly downwards, without so much as a flicker of a gaze. The boy sat opposite her, propped in his grandfather's lap. The boy had never seen a woman for so long and so upfront.

SCHOOL, PRIMARY SCHOOL:
In a khaki uniform
A chowkidar is about
To clang
The school bell
The headmaster’s window was wide open a wall clock tick-ticked. At the stroke of one the chowkidar lunged at his job. Clang-tan-tan.

The children bounced like so many balls onto the playground but one of the boys bolted towards the school’s backyard. On the dot of two minutes before the lunch recess, grandpa Abdul would wait, his clothes smelling faintly of the lamb and potato saalan in a steel box. Infallibly. Brinjals, ladyfingers, potatoes or mutton, saalan was a must, since the large family could at least dip their roti in the gravy, if noting else.

Every weekday, Abdul lunched with his darling grandson under the shadow of the tamarind tree. Quite often, the grandson popped raw tamarind into his mouth, surreptitiously as if it were forbidden manna from heaven. Grandpa would insert a finger in the boy’s mouth, pull the sour tamarind out and toss it away. The grandpa and the boy were inseparable. The boy dreamt of flying like a bird on the wings of his grandpa Shirin. As long as Dada Abdul was alive he lived only for his little grandson. Like the boy, he was absolutely indifferent to the rest of the household.

In a voice quivering with rage, grandpa declared, “The sketches of this boy may be unerasable, he may have drawn all over your books of literature nd
philosophy. I don’t give a damn. All I will say is that no one in this house can
dare to raise his voice or lift a finger on the boy.”

Grabbing the boy by his hand, grandpa stormed out of the house. He
took the boy straight to Salehbhai’s stationery shop in Chhavni Chowk and
bought him a heap of blank sheets of paper, pencils and an eraser.

The day his grandpa died, Maqbool came of age. His father resolved to
send him to a boarding school in Baroda. The boy had retreated into a shell,
closeting himself all day long in his dada’s room. He would sleep in his dada’s
bed, covering himself with the achkan as if he could never ever tear himself
away from his grandpa’s arms. He wouldn’t talk to anyone, he was as silent as
a tomb.

The boy’s father instructed uncle Murad, Take Maqbool to Baroda, he’ll
mingle with kids of his age there he’ll be alright. Besides schooling, he’ll also
learn about his faith there. He’ll learn how to perform namaaz five times a day,
keep Rozas during the months of Ramzan. He’ll be taught the 40 lessons in
piety and the 12 forms of maintaining purity.

Baroda was spanking clean, a city under the tutelage of Maharaja
Siyajirao Gaekwad. The raja was a Maratha, his subjects Gujarati. The
entrance to the city was presided over by a bronze status of his highness astride
a magnificent horse. The status of the raja, his chest puffed up with pride, was
adorned with a replica of amedal bestowed upon him by the empire of
Britannia.
The Hussamiya madrasa, attached to the University, was on Sinhbai Mata Road. The Suleimani boarding school, under the charge of Gujarat’s celebrated scholar Gauhar Ali Hakim, was situated at the tip of the city lake. In deference to the strong leanings of Abbas Taiyabji towards the National Congress and the principles of Mahatma Gandhi, the schools students wore khadi kurta-pajamas and Gandhi caps on their clean-shaven heads.

Theologian Maulvi Akbar taught the Koran ad classical Urdu literature. Keshavlal was the Gujarati language teacher, Major Abdullah Pathan the scout master and Gulzama Khan the band master. Chef Gulal baked rotis for the school and his wife Nargis was justly famous for her mutton shorba.

Maqbool was left within the boundaries of the school building. Slowly but surely, he struck up a friendship with some of the other boys.

Maqbool participated in school sports, snagging the first prize in high jump. He was pretty proficient in athletics actually. And when Mohammed Akhtar, the art teacher, asked the students to copy the huge bird drawn with a chalk on the blackboard, Maqbool sketched an exact replica on his slate. It seemed as if the bird had flown over from the blackboard to Maqbool’s slate.

On October 2, the school was celebrating Gandhi’s birthday. Before the morning class began, Maqbool had completed a portrait of Gandhi on the blackboard. Abbas Taiyabji liked what he saw.
In 1992, he was in Lahore for two months for an exhibition of his work. The unconditional acceptance was gratifying. Maqbool was qabool. He saw in Saba, a graphic artist, an understanding, a sincerity, an instinct to know and learn. Without dogma or instruction, he related to her ail he felt and in his limited way, knew about art. She thanked him without saying a word, her hand cupped into a salaam, she'd leave him before night fell and tongues could orchestrate gossip.

In fact, he hankered for impromptu walks down the streets. One night, on a whim he called up Javed the taxi driver. Maybe he wanted to drive through empty streets, maybe he was restless. He went out to the street, he saw a line by Iqbal, the god of poetry, inscribed on a stone wall. It said, "Na Afghanem, na Turk, na Tatarem. am not an Afghani, Turk or Tartar, 'm just another man who belongs nowhere." At a distance, he could see a sentry, flashing a torch. Why this military presence?

The night was still young. Driver Javed asked, “Where to?” A cassette of songs by Faiz played from the taxi’s stereo speakers.

*Turn na aaye to har cheez wohi thi jo hai*

*Aasman hadde nazar, hadde nazar, rehguzar rehguzar.*

(Ever since you left, nothing has changed

The skies, the clouds go only to return

Ever since you left, nothing has changed, nothing has changed).
There are poems and there are stories, but there were no more pages left for Kishwar Naheed to end her story. There was only her white dupatta. At the insistence of Ahmed Faraz, Husain painted on that dupatta.

The horses of Zahoor Ikhlaq cantered to the haveli of Raza Kazimi in Gulbarga. There was greenery all around out only one of the windows on the upper storey was open. Apparently, Raza slept at unearthly hours. It was as if his life was stored in four different compartments. One compartment was crammed with law books and the second with tables, tanpuras and raag Lalit. The third compartment teemed with faces and memories.