Chapter 4

(a) Brief Discussion of M.F. Husain Techniques at Various Stages.—
(Parliamentary Art work of M.F. Husain).

(b) Conversation with Anjoli Ela Menon. (Reviews from Newspapers).
BRIEF DISCUSSION OF M.F. HUSAIN TECHNIQUES VARIOUS STAGES

Husain's aim in art has been to find a voice reclaimed from his Indian roots with which to respond to a modernizing India in which cubism and multi-national corporations co-exist with ancient epics and non-modernizing villages.

The struggle has been to find terms of modernization which work. Such an act of discovery and creation cannot take place in a day. One cannot simply know in advance how deep certain traditions penetrate people and situations which traditions can be made to speak again in the light of the present and how. The continuous discovery in art of such terms has been Husain's project since the 1940's.

In 1945, there was one group of painters who thought that they must find their own roots. In those days the dominant style was the academic school of Britain Royal Academy and all that, they revolted against school of painting. They just wanted to find the language, so they adopted the western language and western technique, but not in concept. They have a very definite goal. They must find a bridge between the western technique and the eastern concept.

Husain also did many water colour paintings in the 1940's and 1950's and after a hiatus he returned to the medium in the 1970's again. Husain's soul born in water colour and in graphics, is similarly organic, playful and

1. P.A.C. Group.
uncertain. His water colour slides from being solidly about daily events into memory and reverie as if the dream work in itself the magic^2.

Husain display his water colour paintings at Pandola Art Gallery, Bombay on his 15th anniversary. Sufism is the theme of the 30 odd jaintings which are done in vibrant colours. Husain's is also makes use of calligraphy. Says Husain" Calligraphy skill lies not only in the mastery of the individual forms but also in their relationship to the surroundings space. The mlance and the rhythm of form and non-form calligraphy also encompasses .he full expressive range of geometrical form." Speaking on Sufism Husain ways, " Darkness and light are its archetypal symbols because they are natural, .mediate self expression of a root experience of the divinity, some Sufi groups consider numbers the principle of being and the root of all sciences, they express them as the first effusion of the spirit or intellect upon the soul"^3. Husains's earliest oil paintings between 1948-52 were important because of their relative Indian art values of that time. They also hold a significant place in Husain's own development. The characters of these paintings were a part of Husain's immediate environment. They freshly apprehended and in their transmutations as pictorial entities, They had a raw expressionistic impact, a quality are often misses in his more chastened, sometimes too sophisticated work of later years.

There are the early, vigorous figures in Husain's paintings for which the ladies from his neighbourhood served as models, a painting such as Marathi

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^2 The water colour series in painting is called ‘Raj.
^3 The life and time of M.F. Husain by British Nandy.
women" provides an excellent example of this phase and also a link with his most remarkable paintings of the phase between 1955-60. The female colossus in a section of the mural painting, "Indian village" is a sort of archetypal mother with a black child tumbling between her thighs. There are the sturdy women in "Between the spider and the Lamp" and here, Husain's boldness of form and powerful belineation take on a special meaning because they are used to for describing a primitive unself-consciousness. Husain's boldness of form and powerful belineation take on a special meaning because they are used to for describing a primitive unself-consciousness.

There is another category of what appear to be distinctly muslimwomen such as the one in "Blue Night", "Two Women in Dialogue", "Fatima", and "At the Bridge". They can be identified as muslim by their dress and even more by their ambience, dusky light, a lamp, and prayer book, the evening star and a bleeness of a dream. Husain makes it a point to emphasize the reticence, the refinement the chastity of such a figure by the manner in which the slender body is held and draped.

The majority of Husain's female figures have been thus deliberately unalluring and even grave in their simple, natural beauty. The greater liberty he has taken with the female form in recent years is, therefore very conspicuous. Besides the village belles of the travel posters, complete with costume and coy glances, he has been painting young blithe nudes, often forcibly cast in some mythological role. A self conscious erraticism has surfaced in some of his recent pictures, replacing the austerity of the earlier figures. Since the entire spate of
such images comes at a time when a good deal of Husain's work has acquired haphazard features, it is hard to say whether it is his concept of the woman that was changed or the control over his pictorial elements which has suffered a slack. The next phase beginning from about 1953, often referred to as Husain's 'Folk' period was the result of a rather self conscious search for a style. At a time when Indianriess was a recurring issue, Husain partly yielding to such indirect pressures and partly in continuation of his own involvement with the Indian environment, took up a variety of The water colours, wooden toys and murals of this time had verve and charming beet they lacked a deeper aesthetic significance which husain had already expressed in his earlier work. This was an early indication that precedence to pictorial considerations, without a corresponding personal involvement with content tended to leave him with a mannered and decorative residue.

After 1959 the inspiration of his paintings has not come from the sculpture of Mathura. Khajuraho or Konaraka but from live dancers who immulate the divine nartakis of stone. Husain has been fascinated by Bharata Natyam and Odissi, with their geometric well-regulated, highly stylized movements. From many years we have never failed to get in every other picture a figure with its slender body arranged in the tribhanga position, or a more exaggerated version of it, with one leg a upraised and bent at the knee, the hand lifted in a gesture, generally that of the "Abhaya Mudra" which characterize the benevolent gods. These are not necessarily paintings about dance. Such a figure has become a stereo type with Husain and appears
everywhere whether it is located on the ghat's of Varansi or in the thick jungles of Kerala.

Once the figure became a full fledged stereotype in Husain's hands, the head and face seemed some how to petrify. We have already mentioned that Husain is the one artist after Amrita Sher-Gill to have developed an Unlike her an enduring, indeed haunting face for his Indian figures. Unlike her, Husain did not depend on either beauty or pathos to create an appealing effect. The faces of his figures have been positively plan, stark and alive. In the last decade or so, the austerity of that face the ruggedness of its lines and the peculiar started expression have had little to do with the rest of the picture, relying upon a variety of themes he now provides a good deal of super fluous drama, but no real or continuing subject matter.

Husain is very much interested in horses 1951, he had painted maxoo husain's' faithful horse duldul, the inspiration came from his active participation in making and painting horses for the Tazia' from the time he was a young boy.

Since around 1954 there has been a great proliferation in Husain's art, both in themes and handling. There are his Ragmala and Nritya series. Theme of these paintings based upon village life.

Series based on his travels to Rajasthan. Banaras, Kashmir, Mysore the Middle east. There are many paintings of Horses priests, and women. There are several self portraits also.

Considering that Husain uses metaphors at every step, one can surmise that he has decided aspirations to a pictorial mythology of his own. It is more
accident that from the very start he has taken up themes and characters from Indian mythology. He does not touch inhibits him in that area. His picturization of Siva and Durga of Hanuman and Ganesa his series of paintings on the Ramayana and the Mahabharata tend to the attractive and flamboyant, but unfortunately on the whole banal. There is one element which gives them illustrative aspects and a lively quirk. Husain has derived the pictorial version of mythology from folk fairs and festivals where the enactment of the epics and Puranic tales in the forms of dance drama is always quiet utterly fantastic there has always been a touch of humour and satire in Husain's work. He done many experiments in his large Art carrier and still active to create something new in Art history.

"Thus in the early 1950's husain had begun to free his art from subject matter and his colour from being restricted or confined within forms The enclosing lines also became increasingly unnecessary as new lines or edges were obtained by the juxtaposition of one colour with another. These were innovations which helped to liberate his own expression at the same time they advanced new aims. The decrease in the emphasis on the subject matter gradually gave way to painterly and abstract norms".

Early of his carrier husain deliberately picked up two or three periods of Indian history to create his own style in Art. One was the classical period of the Guptas. The very sensuous form of the female body. Next, was the Basoli period. The strong colours of the Basoli miniatures. The last was the folk element.
And after this is 1948, Husain exhibited fire of his paintings at the Bombay art societies annual show. On seeing them, Bendre remarked, "You have discovered a new form. In the History of figurative Art." and smiled. It was the smile of a man who had seen Husain grow from a committed enthusiast to a full-fledged painter.

On the verge of a new chapter in his painting, Husain is acquiring a control over different mediums, from brush to pen and pen to charcoal or nail and now paper cuts. His creativity lies in the coordination of hand and mind. In this little attic Husain is creating one of the greatest paintings of life. An eighteen feet land mural on canvas in oil entitled, "Village life". The mural is descriptive of a village panorama, sweeping the horizon with its multi-consciousness of life both bizarre and sublime.

In his early works, the colour areas seem close to cubism but are rather something special to Husain. The whole painting is divided into several patches which are then echoed primary colours-red, yellow, green and blue. An instinctive knowledge of natural creation allows him to evolve nature through forms.

Husain has preferred strong colours throughout his career. He chooses the lavish Indian palette used by Rajput painters. He also applied colours flat as in Rajput miniatures and it looks more attractive through the use of warm colours, more often contrasting than complementary.

Although Husain uses traditional bright colours, he is yet the most modern among contemporary Indian painters because he has invented a full
range of colours juxtapositions and suitable forms for his subjects. It is
astanishing to see in the Kala bhawan examples how closely Rajput art and
wooden toys are knitted together collaboration to form a completely new
pictorial world.

Husain's senility touches outward manifestations and in baking with the
traditions of the past, he is only creating new ones, two experience the objects
in a mood of contemporary awareness. No attempt is made two burden the
painting with a message, the content is a part of the whole scheme as colour is
a part of the form.

The form comes to life with line. The deep confident line seeks o
enclose reality in search of eternity. He is straving to unfold his complete
personality and poor it out into the canvas. Husain has reached a paint in his
recent work where he is on the verge of touching something that in beyond
himself. Lines are confident and the figure studies a part of the world pattern.
There is a interplay of line and colour which simplifies the form and captures
the sculptures feeling.

Husain's leading role in this artistic emergence can be illustrated through
his use of water colours and graphics. The importance of watercol-our to
Husain cannot be overdressed. He did many water colours in his 1940 and
1950's.

Husain's aim in water colour and in his art generally is to plot the return
to his roots, while painting in Paris or New York about nuclear war or Picasso
or Wimbledon. His recovery of roots in the light of his modern concerns is a
melding, he observes world artistic influences in the light of modern artistic influences and modern Indian life. Such an art of bridges bespeaks our contemporary concern with global communication, but it also aims to bridge the gaps between India's voices between the vibrancy of modern India and its own the traditional roots, its villages, its rich and enduring forms of life. Understanding how Husain achieves his voices in large part consists in following through this dual transpositions of forms from Indian traditions and from the modern west.

Husain's magic in everywhere playful, Hanuman is dressed as superman the English women of the Rajput disarmed figures as if Cheshire cats, visual jokes tricks of hand and erotic innuendi abound. But the magic also forebodes uncertainly. He maps out a territory in which play and uncertainly co-exist, with play half-concealing and half - revealing confusion or threat, one domain of such passage is clearly that of modern India itself whose direction is uncertain and whose myths and symbols are in reformulation.

Another one important experiment husain had done was he want to give to his viewers everything that helps communicate. Epic forms, classical symbols mythology and characters from the pyramic lore abound in his paintings. Husain even writes on the canvas. He is obsessed about the viewer grasping the theme about being able to reach Indians at large.

Husain has always painted, along with his figures a variety of metaphors and symbols that are literary scared, eccentric, or merely decorative. The sources of these are varied the bird in cage, the lamp, the sun, and the moon are
literary images as frequent in Sanskrit as in Urdu verse. The snake, which
dwells in the earth and creeps over the ground like a winding river, is an
enbodinent of terrestrial life forces and a symbol of fertility in Hindu
mythology finding a variety of formal manifestations in Indian art. The
imprint of hand which features often in Husain's work, is one of the primordial
symbols, undoutedly one of the first visual expressions of man's consciousness
of his own presence.

In Husain's case, to factors have interposed to give it meaning. Since his
childhood he had seen the panjab depicted in Islamic iconography. At a later
stage the panjab becomes a mudra under the inspiration of Bharatanatyan.

"In Husain tendency to romanticize, Husain in is line with Amrita Sher-
Gill, Jamini Roy and George Keyt for that matter with the Bengali's from
Rabindra Nath Tagore to Sailoz Mukherzia. Though many artist have been
renowned of the life in rural India, It is Ararita Sher-Gill who shaped the most
haunting image of the Indian villages; She lent the villagers her own romantic
consciousness her own melancholy, as a taken perhaps of her sympathy with
them. She made her Indians beautifully dark and emaciated. She should them
immabile; brooding over an ever lasting dream. Husain took Amrita's legacy
further towards a more authentic stage. This villages are not particularly
beautiful but surrounded by their tools, Their animals, Their magic signs and
symbols the appeal more truely alive secure and rooted in their environment."
SANSAD UPANISHAD

M. HUSAIN IN PARLIAMENT

REFLECTIONS IN DRAWINGS

Husain
राजा रथ्न

राज्य सभा

श्यामाप्रकाश मुखर्जी
अब्दुल कालिंद आज़ाद
Thirteen bricks
Imagine me sitting in Rajya Sabha for six years without uttering a word. I was watching the entire sequence as if Fedrico Fellini is conducting one great opera with coloured costume, pomp and bravado. All the silent gesture of characters, swift flow of their heated argument, point of order, perfectly chorographed walk out and walk in theumping of their chest of drawers.

Abrupt adjournment of the house empty seats. Littered thoughts. I begin together the pages of my sketch book the Rajya Sabha Pad.

Not one page could remain blank. Many proceedings and reseedings of the house, more or less recorded, in a language which is not one of the fourteen languages, officially recognized by the government language is visual hieroglyph. That how mankind began communicating with each other by drawing images on the time less sheets of roach cut surfaces.

I think what I have tried to capture in these drawing (mind you not caricature) is not just reportage of events in the life of a Nation, but several voices of tearing turn will and crying cracks of parched earth there comes the Meghraj riding elephants high in the skey, through drenched clouds. Floods of abundance Helps of grain shines like gold GNP Shoots up. Boom bursts into
flame. Bomb blast. Shanty dwellings razed to the ground to Erect the absence high rise structure.

In the midst of such have and cry you hear the distance song of fair weather, not far from where you stand.

Across the river behind the mountain. The house reassembles member return wearing fresh smiles on their faces, Great each other Enters Jaya lalita from Tamilnadu, wearing MGR dark glasses, her screen tested glow of beauty sparkles the house.

The speaker too becomes speeches less for one minute. Another electrifying entry fire brand Renuka Chowdhary from Andhra bearing the stamp of NTR. I tried to sketch her piercing voice which could pass through the hard core roch and can be heard on the other side of the border. The only person whose speech on the floor of the house gripped my attention as if I was listening to a piece of literature. I instantly became his great admire most of the time I preferred to sit which him in the central Hall. Once we were sipping coffee together, a friend shouted from the other end of the hall "Hey Husain you are sitting with the right person who is in the wrong party "That person is Mr. Jaswant Sing. All along my sitting in parliament I continued making hundreds of drawing. My personal observation of things happening to my country and I felt lucky to get a chance to know my land and its people in depth. Many friends and journalists were keen to see what F have been scribbling but like my silence of six years in the house I never showed or released to press any of the sketches done there.
Thus we the gang of four invaded the parties meant unblock, cultural invasion Ravi Shanker with his sita R.K Narayen with his Malgudy days Amrita Pritam her powerful Punjabi poetry and appointer like me.

We all sometime sit to getter in a row like a comic strip looking a bunch of stronger surrounded by dealers in the whole sale politics.

I would like to conceded my Sansad Upanishad with a strong yearning wish, I wish more cultural temper should be mixed in day to day dealings of our great Indian parliament rather than any other hot temper ingredient,

Think of the golden era of Ashoka the great nebar-e-Azam.

(Husain 24 Nov. 1993)
REVIEW FROM NEWSPAPERS AND CONVERSATION

Anjolie Ela Menon In San Francisco

The Asian Art Museum in San Francisco is one of the great Museums of the world, Indian artist Anjolie Ela Menon has been honoured with a six month solo at the Museum featuring her large triptych entitled Yatra- the exhibition opens on the 20th of May 2006.

This large work is inspired by the annual march of the Kavadiyas to the holy sites on the Ganga, where they gather in their millions each year during Shravan to collect water in pots to carry back to their village shrines for the worship of Shiva, sometimes walking barefoot 500 miles.

A simultaneous exhibition of her work will be held at Gallery Artsindia, Palo Alto. Menon who has been awarded the Padmashree is amongst the most important artists in the current scene in contemporary Indian art.

Isana Murti writes in the portfolio published by Lalit Kala Akademi in 2006 'Anjolie Ela Menon, one of India's best known artists' had her first solo exhibition in 1958 where renowned critic Richard Barthlomew wrote, I have no doubt that before long this gifted young woman will be joining the ranks of our very best painters'. These words have been truly prophetic and Menon's trajectory over the last five decades is testimony to the evolution of an artist who has defied easy classification and who has broken fresh ground with confident panache.

Ranjit Hoskote writes 'Menon has always prized what she terms the 'aura' of the paintings. This aura has been achieved in her finest works.'
Gayatri Sinha writes 'Her panoply of figures, as they appear, signify non-space and non-time...Like a wanton fabulist, Menon brings accretion, division, conjunction to play upon the conventional image.... Menon insists on the location of the past in the present. Her painting argues against cultural amnesia,'

"If this exhibition brings some honour to India and creates an awareness about Indian Contemporary Art it will be an important milestone for me"- Menon. In a soul searching interview, Menon reveals all about herself, her inspirations, her evolution and her innermost sensibilities.....

IM: Like that of most remarkable artists, your work has evolved over the years. Do you see any particular phases in your evolution? What in your opinion, were the turning points in your development as an artist and what caused them?

AEM: I think there have been four phases so far, all connected with stages in my life. First, my earliest work, which had all the vigour and brashness of extreme youth. There was an untrammelled energy, an impatience with technique. It was truly expressionist without any conscious effort or knowledge of formal qualities. I learnt to draw long after I'd begun to paint. I painted in this manner till I was eighteen.

Two years later, in 1960, I went to Paris and studied in the Atelier Fresque at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, In fresco one has to draw because the fresh, wet lime-plaster is applied along the line of the drawing each day, rather like doing one huge piece of a jigsaw puzzle. It also uses a single application of
pigment. There is no over-painting, no rubbing out. This technique brought me to use thinner paint and the picture, insinuating himself into nearly every frame during that period. As a child I'd lie in bed fascinated by the dance of the house lizards on the ceiling of our cantonment, home. These lizards, too, often appear unexpectedly in some corner. Ultimately, the crow, who is one of the most human of creatures, became a sort of alter-ego, an observer demanding to be let in and he has been there ever since, though with diminishing frequency.

**IM:** Could you comment on the use of symbols in your canvases? The kites, the trailing thread, the scattered cloth...

**AEM:** I think 'symbols' is perhaps too big a word for the small things that insinuate themselves into my canvases. 'Symbol' is a critic's word, surely. The threads, the necklaces, the kites, the little animals or draped cloth, transparent or opaque - these are the accoutrements and trappings that accompany the figure in my work. These are no conscious attempts at symbolism, though much has been written about the optimism of the kites or the sadness of sailing boats and so on. Sometimes it is mere ornamentation, the essentially feminine need to embellish or embroider, at other times it is the need to accent or to focus on the colour for purely painterly reasons such as perspective or tension.

The Asian Art Museum in San Francisco is one of the great Museums of the world, Indian artist Anjolie Ela Menon has been honoured with a six month solo at the Museum featuring her large triptych entitled Yatra - the exhibition opens on the 20th of May 2006.
This large work is inspired by the annual march of the Kavadiyas to the holy sites on the Ganga, where they gather in their minions each year during Shravan to collect water in pots to carry back to their village shrines for the worship of Shiva sometimes walking barefoot 500 miles.

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**Quotes:**

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**REVIEWS FROM NEWSPAPER:**

It is a beautifully achieved painting-

Says Ravi Kumar, proud owner of the Hussain Menon Tryptych

**Art and culture:**

Two buzz words that spell legitimacy for those with money and power. However slipshod his feet and unruly his hair, it is the mystical persona of the person who practices “art culture” whose association rubs off the grime that money by itself confers on any event or object and gives
it a patina of ultimate desirableness.

Such a one is Ravi Kumar, 61, the Paris based publisher of some of the finest books on art concerning India, art collector and just recently the person who bid Rs. 14 Lakh for a beautiful triptych painted jointly by Ajoli Ela Menon and M.F. Hussain. The auction of the painting was the high point of the special, “all white” evening crafted by the ladies of the Umang charitable society at the lawn of Roosevelt House, home of Mr. Frank wisner, the American Ambassador.

About the Menon Hussain tryptich, he say, as far as international contemporary art is concerned, painting a picture together, as Picasso and Braque did in 1910 is a nice tradition in the west I thought it was a good idea for a maestro like Maqbool Fida Hussain to collaborate with a dividely sensitive painter like Anjolie. It is a beautifully achieved painting that has a great deal of sensitivity.”

It is this kind of sensitivity to issues of art that we need in any interface between the world of money and power and that of the artist. From helping the limited aim of Umang (education of under privileged children) to the larger one of protecting heritage for future generations, that is the task cut out for the likes of Ravi Kumar.
Anjolie Ela Menon's family is as exotic as her work. And a huge but subtle influence. Kaverree Bamzai reports on how the Grand Central Station that her home has become allows her to be the great artist she is.

There's a short history of her life right at the entrance, written in ink on the wall. 22 July 1994: Pupsa, Miki, Muffet, Beeni moved the saaman. Pupsa and Vandana married. 15 July 1998: Miki's 60th birthday. 5 August: Ananti was born.

Muffet is a Labrador who died. The author, a small woman with a large forehead and larger talent, is Miki's wife, Mini — named after Mickey and Minnie Mouse by their elder son, Aditya (referred to as Pupsa). The world, however, knows Mini as the artist Anjolie Ela Menon. And as you see her sitting amidst the debris of her New Delhi living room — it has just been upset by a zealous film crew — you can see why she calls her home the Grand Central Station. Much of it finds its way into her paintings. And why shouldn't it? If there's anything more exotic than Menon's characteristic window frames, solitary crow, and those unseeing Bergmanesque eyes, it's her family.

Menon, who used to be Anjolie Ela Dev, is the granddaughter of Birendra Chandra Gupta, an electrical engineer from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who went to Kashmir to electrify the valley with his American wife, Ethel.

Menon was born in Asansol (in what eventually became the Martin Burn guest house) and spent many years dragging after her Army officer father. But when her mother Eunice Ela died, she was sent to Lovedale in the Nilgiri Hills at the age of 11. That's where she met her husband, retired Admiral K Raja Menon, who is now a well-regarded defence analyst. She married him upon her return from Paris in 1962 where she studied at the Ecole Des Beaux Arts. They were childhood sweethearts and she says that made things easier.

If Menon moved 15 times when she was growing up, she shifted home 30 times when she was married. She's been in Vladivostok, where he muse dried up completely "because there was so much of everything", and France, where she always likes to soak in the beauty of the Saint Chappelle cathedral. So how does she manage? Whether it's working with old window frames because she can't find canvas, whether it's her phase with old furniture or whether it's her current obsession with kitsch, she says her work's always been a process of "making do. But then that's a large part of a woman's life anyway."

Because of her very Western upbringing (her grandmother, who continued to wear the very latest fashions from Saks, Fifth Avenue, was a dominant presence), the fact that her family were Brahmins, Menon still feels disadvantaged by her lack of "rootedness". "I'm trying to catch up now," she says, indicating Vandana, her architect daughter-in-law. "She's teaching me. These days we even do henna for special occasions." Kitch (she had an exhibition in New York recently of her new work, Gods and Others) is her attempt to find her Indianess: "The most important visual matrix of our times is the aesthetics or lack of it in Bollywood. I'm partly embracing it and partly mocking it." But always creatively.
A master copy

Continued from page 1

Santiniketan masters

Conforms Arun Vedavth of Vedavth Art Gallery "Scores of fakes are coming into the gallery. One has to be very aware. We do try to check on the provenance and get high-value paintings authenticated. Understandably, people are hesitant when dealing with signatures which carry a big demand in the market."

Ghanta Pyne relates an incident when a young couple from Alumathana came to check a work supposed to have been painted by Gyone. Pyne told them that it was not his work, which disturbed the couple. They had bought it after certification by a Delhi-based expert. They threatened to sue the expert unless one could stand their apology, as a Pyne tempera runs into several lakhs of rupees.

The Laxman Ratan Vadehra of Laxman Ratan Vadehra and Sons, long-time dealer of Santiniketan work, questions the authenticity of a painting that was put on the block at a recent Bowring's auction in Delhi. The painting is a smallish oil on board measuring 14 in, signed and dated 1969. Says Saran, "structurally poor and lacks luminosity. The date does not coincide with the kind of work Gyone was doing at the time. By 1969-70, Gyone was entering into his mature phase but did not do oils on board."

Browings withdraw these paintings as their authenticity was under doubt: An untitled oil on canvas dated 1969 by Santiniketan 5 (Gaitonde (left)), Mani Bai's 'Landscape' with his signature in Bengali (above left), and Nandalall Bose, signed, inscribed and dated 'Man Seated Under A Smudl Tree. To Bhaironsingh'. The buying agent, Arjohe Ela Memon (below), has started putting thumbprintings on her canvasses.

Browings Fine Auctioneers says, "We are careful about checking the authenticity of works. Often we go for an expert's opinion, and there is almost no major doubt; we do not draw the works from sale." He remembers the bona fide over the Gaitondes. In the event, they were not sold. Browings also withdrew the Nandalall Bose and Ramkinkars from the sale as theLed experts feared serious doubts about their authenticity.

The faking industry is on overdrive in implicating old masters like Raja Ravi Varma, Tagore, Nandalall Bose, Hemendr' Majumdar, Roy and Ramkinkar Bai. And it is not just in India. Dead or alive, famous artists have high resale value at international auctions. The domestic market are also being duped with a vengeance. It is whispered that there are ring leaders in Kolkata and Mumbai where the fakers are churned out on demand. Pyne suggests that professional artists are embarking on this unscrupulous business and even more alarming is the involvement of dealers with people involved in any authenticating exercise often getting threatening calls.

Husain, Memon, Pyne top the list of victims. A lot of Scoons had also come into the market at one time. Now Gaitondes are making an appearance. "Dealers have to be very careful," warns Ramachandran. Jogen Chowdhury, Chasras are also being faked. Husain thinks it is "an acquired disease" in all cultures. He quotes Picasso as saying, "There are no serious collectors". When a well-to-do lady from a respected Delhi family approached him, Chowdhury asked the artist to sign a customary measure of having two copies of signed photographs of the work, one to be given to the buyer and one kept by the artist. But such steps cannot always keep up with the pace of resale.

It really depends on the collector to familiarise himself with the artist's language, study the stylistic developments in a given period, acquaint himself with reputable exhibitions and reading up published literature, in short be committed to his passion. There are no strict cuts, unless they are prepared to hire expert advice at a price, like the Gaitondes and the Guggenheims often do. A written certificate or as an investment has its pitfalls.

Close studies of an artist's work during a certain period can easily reveal the discrepancies, Saran says. Ramachandran talks of a lotus pond dated 1970 surfacing in Mumbai. That at that time, lotus ponds were not even a blue bird. A lotus is a delicate flower and needs a lot of care and attention. Memon mentions painting a series on a Brahmin sect, who painted the name of Deo all over his body. Quite recently, a painting was supposed to have been done by Memon, appeared in a conservatory studio. It showed a head covered with hieroglyphs and had a superficial resemblance. The conservator had doubts. Memon took the art to the IDS and the artist confirmed that it was a fake.

Art of buying originals

1. Always buy through a reputable gallery.
2. Always try to get a written certificate of authenticity.
3. If you are a new buyer, an auction is not the best place to start your collection.
4. Questionable works surface there, and you may not get the right person to authenticate a work at the preview or from the catalogue.
5. Be careful about dealers who bring you big names unless you know them very well.
6. Get the work authenticated from a reputable gallery or the NGMA.
7. The galleries will not charge you. But they are sometimes hesitant about authentication.
8. Works supplied by dealers as threats are often made.
9. The preview and the published catalogue for an auction act as a safety net. Certainly, well-researched publications with adequate pictorial documentation will be a great help. Vedavth strongly recommends a three-fold strategy - an agency for authenticating, a department within a law-enforcing agency and a property audit, which monitors the cell for art-related frauds.
10. Who will fund such agencies? A lot of proposals are made, but funds are needed. Authentication industry will be dependent but supported by technology. The most pivotal is, who will fund such agencies?
Among The Emerging Talent, Women Really Stand Out

The Padma Shree was long overdue for Anjolie Ela Menon. She was surrounded on it 10 years ago, but it didn’t come and she doesn’t know why. Not that she was holding her breath for it, she laughs, it was just that she was intrigued.

This time, two days before the official announcement, a magistrate came to see her to make sure she had no problem accepting it. The artist, known not just for her paintings but for her secular views and outspokenness, holds forth on the award.

What does getting the Padma Shree mean to you?

Getting the Padma Shree is indeed an honour, so I am naturally very pleased.

Very few women figure in the list every year. Do you feel they are being marginalised?

I am often asked whether there is gender discrimination. And I have always laughed at it, saying all I lacked was a wife. I have not made a note of the gender-based statistic of this award, but yes, it’s possible that more men than women are considered for it.

You’re known to be a fairly secular person and have not used words while criticising the rightist or fundamentalist forces. How does it feel to accept the award from a BJP government?

My secular outlook has nothing to do with party politics. It is because I don’t know any other way. I come from a very mixed family, where my closest relatives are Hindus, Muslims, Catholics, Brahmins, Protestants and Sikhs. With an American grandmother, a British brother-in-law, Malayali husband, French aunt, Muslim uncle, and a Sikh daughter-in-law, I am proud to be an Indian!

I am accepting the award from the Government of India and not from a particular party. I am not a vocal secularist in my beliefs, it does not detract from the fact that I am and have always been apolitical.

Part of the reason why I voice my views vociferously is that the whole basis of creativity (mine or any other artist’s) rests upon freedom of thought and expression, which I shall always cherish and defend, no matter which government is in power. I am sure no one could accuse me of being motivated by expedience.

After Amrita Sher-Gil, your name crops up as a pioneer among women painters. What do you feel?

I have always been in awe of Amrita Sher-Gil and her brilliant contribution to contemporary Indian art. However, I have always asserted that one cannot judge the contribution of an artist until a considerable body of work has been seen and valued. It’s also true that many women artists of my generation simply dropped out halfway through their career. One will soon see the impact of this because amongst the emerging talent, women artists really stand out.

Since you have been an inspiration for a whole generation of women artists, what changes have you noticed since the time you began? Did being a woman make it difficult for you? Do you feel as a trail-blazer?

I do not think of myself as a trail-blazer at all. The need to create was the only motivating force, and I see my career as an artist as a series of little milestones painstakingly created over years of fairly hard work. This search and struggle is to find a unique idiom to express one’s own vision, to establish a signature which doesn’t resemble the signature of any earlier artist. That’s the one which causes sleepless nights, emotional crises, despair, exhilaration, and, on rare occasions, a sense of deep satisfaction. No, women artists don’t find it easier now. But they are much tougher now. They are more much focused, committed and bold.

You have done several experimental investigations, for instance computer morphing. How would you assess your contribution to the art world?

If the experiments I have made continuously found followers while I moved on to a new phase, that is a measure of their success. I think we have to combine new technologies with the quest for indigenous sources, both ancient and contemporary, rather than look westward for inspiration.

How well has Indian art been doing abroad? The general belief is that it is mainly NRIs who buy Indian art.

The auctions have brought Indian art into focus, and we are at least being recognised as having a significant contemporary art movement. As for sales, the Indian diaspora is immense and I would say constitutes about 65 per cent of the interest in contemporary Indian art worldwide.

For true globalization, what we need is a permanent presence for Indian art in New York, San Francisco, Tokyo and London, which is supported by some real funds instead of sporadic efforts by government or private galleries. India’s time will come on the global scene in the decade.