Chapter – III
From Naturalistic representation to Interpretive and Abstract presentation in Indian context
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A Brief history and philosophy of art in India

The philosophy dominant in modern Indian Art is dialogical in terms of human-world, human-human and human-society relationships. The authority of arts has been taken into consideration from the ancient saints or ‘munis’ to the modern art critics and philosophers. Ancient essayists had been skeptic about their mysterious power and apprehensive of the risk the arts appear to present to the strength of the social order. The credibility of their account for the arts can be gleaned from their ideas suggesting proposal for control. But this idea of controlling the impact of art was challenged. The philosophy of art in India is both a kind of didacticism and orthodox idea of freedom in art creation and a critique of this kind of didactic approach founded upon ethical conservatism. The critique is particularly in the context of art being complementary to and concomitant with religiosity and religious revelation. Moreover, art creation and aesthetic experience are often held as parallel to religious realization.

Representation in Indian art carries with it many metaphysical issues and propositions. Study of Indian iconography reveals that many sacred images are with implicit or explicit spiritual meanings connected with temple worship. Such representations are not always naturalistic. (Chari: 2002:52-73). Coming to the scenario of modern Indian art, particularly in the domain of painting, we notice a gradual shift from the idea of naturalistic representation to the presentation of what is either real, colored with specific creative thoughts of the artist concerned or absolutely from the imagination and inner struggle of the artist.
All the way through the history to modernity, Indian artistic formation has pursued diverse fundamental passages, the collective and unidentified conception of the people, and the cultured, proficient creation by individual artists, whose faculty is in fact absolutely resolute. Consequently, the history prepared an upbeat note on the progress of great artists who represented a radiant fraction of vigorous individualities. With the collapse of Mughal regimes and decline and erosion in all the pictorial traditions including indigenous and so-called conceptual arts of India, a necessity was created in the mind of the artists for a revisit to the artistic tradition of the country and sustenance of their own identity and existence. Colonialists’ inclination necessitated this further against the backdrop of the derivative academic art practices forced by the company rule at a later stage. It led the artists and others to a sort of loyalty to the ‘Swedeshi’ movement and relate it to the art practices in the country. As a result, they discarded the whole company mania as a ‘distortion’ of Indian history and they got involved in exploring the past aesthetic glory or ‘Great Art’ of our country and nurtured deeply their historic-cultural connection with Ajanta, Mughal and other miniature traditions. The similar urge can be sought in the later commentators, company painters, and Bengal school artists in their search for Indianness in art works and instantiation of it leading to a characterization of modern Indian art. As Tapati Guha Thakurta says, “Along with changed patterns of patronage, practice and professions, a set of radically altered ideas about ‘art’ and ‘artist’, ‘tradition’ and ‘progress’ very clearly block this phase of history as ‘modern’ - both in the perceptions of the artists and in those of later critics and art historian”.ii (Thakurta Tapati Guha, 1992)
A number of changes in the history and philosophy of painting in India took place in modern times. Gradually, the new trend dissociated itself from close alliance with objects, experiences and manifestations of the nature or the world around the individual artists. The concept of ‘modern’ is also to be understood in a special sense in Indian context. First, because of nationalist fervor, it evolved in India in close association with ‘primitivism’ and with a critique of western modernism. As Partha Mitter observes, as early as 1895, the leading nationalist environmentalist, Rabindranath Tagore, had rejected the trappings of colonial urban civilization in favour of the ‘primitive’ simplicity of the proverbial hermitage set at the edge of the forest. In 1909 he expanded this idea in his seminal essay ‘The Hermitage’, describing a rural site where man and nature joined in a mystical communion in renunciation of western materialism. By 1915, the locus of the nation was clearly shifting from the historic past to the countryside as anti-colonial environmentalism joined forces with a new commitment to ‘the wretched of India’. iii (Mitter: 2007:29)

The naturalistic representation of Ravi Varma’s kind carried some allegiance to the Indian ethos in terms of representing the Indian mythological characters and scenarios. In 1907, Ramananda Chatterjee wrote, “May we not hope that the advent and popularity of a painter like Ravi Varma are artistic indications of the returning interest of the nation in mundane existence? … What we are here concerned with is to note that Ravi Varma’s paintings represent to some extent, but not entirely, a return to nature in the creative function of art in the domain of mythology.” iv (Chawla: 1993:146).

As Mitter described naturalistic representation took a different turn toward ‘primitivism’ for the historic emphasis upon the rural dimension of
Indian reality and critique of colonial perception. Primitivism identified folk, rural and tribal arts and their representation as an authentic expression of Indian soul. It had a powerful impact upon aesthetic perception of modern times superseding Victorian over-ornamentation and projecting a preference for robust innocence and the simplicity of village life.

Consciousness of Indian identity had gone through a political, social and cultural upheaval for the emergence of a national-modern equation replacing the bias of colonial perception of it. Raja Ravi Varma and the awakened Bengal hastened the process of formulating this ‘new’ in Indian painting. It is in general established that Raja Ravi Varma may have used diverse canvases as vehicles for his paintings and that the artworks of him themselves necessarily represent a certain historical occurrence rather than the recent western style adopted by the others. The nature of representation here remained in a static manner without much alteration, but with a move little ahead of mere one-to-one correspondence. Here representation remained as a form of depiction unique of figurative paintings, drawings, and photographs, prints, maps, notes, descriptions, diagrams etc. In one way or another, it manages to create some space for alternative ways of interpretation beyond the parameters of realism. Even then Ravi Varma’s contribution in this historic transition from naturalistic representation and mimetic culture cannot be ignored. *(ThakurtaTapatiGuha, 1992). Ravi Varma’s direction of work, significantly coincided with Hindu mythology, Sanskrit literature, Maha Kavya and other translations from Sanskrit, the ingredients to the artist dipped into his visual imaginary as a whole as a notion of inseparability of his perception and the representation of the subject matter.
Indian paintings gradually moved away from the domain of the religious, divine and princely being. The very idea of Indian art denotes a conglomeration of diverse trends and schools of art in the Indian subcontinent. Transition from naturalistic representation to abstraction or interpretative art is not of linear type. The paintings of diverse schools, trends and historical phases had a cumulative effect on what we understand today abstract or interpretive art in Indian context. Artistic trends from the rock paintings of prehistoric era, the Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka, and huge frescoes of Ajanta paintings and sculptures are regarded as works of art with reference to various art trends including Buddhist religious art and worldwide pictorial art. “Indian paintings afford aesthetic varieties that broaden from the early civilization to the present day, and have advanced over the years to become a synthesis of various cultures and traditions. It was also exposed to Greco-Roman, Iranian and Chinese influences”. vi (Chaitanya Krishna, 1995)

The early instances of murals initiatives in the caves of Ajanta and Bagh, and the remains of mural paintings bring into being in the contemporary Pitalkhora Caves. Untimely indications of the traditional mural paintings in southern India established in the sites of Badami and Sittanavasal. Kailasnatha temple, Ellora has also the evidence of mural. Ancient Indian Paintings generally categorize as murals and miniatures. Patchy indication of mural paintings of the Sixth century A.D marked on caves of Khandagiri and Udayagiri and Sitabhinji, the earliest paintings from Orissa.

Later the ‘Palas’ of Bengal led the way for traditional miniature painting in India. The institution of miniature paintings passed through the painters of diverse schools. In western India, miniature tradition developed between the
tenth to twelfth centuries. Earliest one of the Jaina illustrated palm-leaf manuscripts are Oghaniryukti and Dasavaikalikatika, and the existing instance of an added early illustrated Jaina palm leaf manuscript ‘Savagapadikkamana-suttacunni’ by Pandit Ramachandra. From fourteenth century, the paper replaced palm leaf and the finest example of the Illustrated paper manuscripts include the Kalpasutra of Bhadrabahu and the Kalakacharyakatha. This tradition accomplishes a patronizing level by the late fifteenth and sixteenth century rulers. Concurrently a relatively good number of Hindu illustrated manuscripts emerged in Western India, which includes the Gita Govinda of Jayadeva and Bhagavathapurana. The extensive wall painting had conquerors and observes the dawn of miniature paintings during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The new style ‘manuscripts’ shaped in the form of images impressed on palm-leaf on Buddhism and Jainism. In eastern India, the foremost cores of the Buddhist regime are Nalanda, Odantapuri, Vikramshila and Somarpura in the Pala kingdom, Bengal and Bihar from tenth century, on palm leaves with wooden wrap. The significant illustrative manuscripts are Pancharaksha, Karandavyuha and Kalachakryanatantra.vi (Chatterjee Margaret (Edit), 1988)

Tanjore, a center in Tamil Nadu dates back to 1600 AD, the Cholas, who encouraged art and literature. Tanjore glass painting a novel traditions was started through the style of traditional manuscripts and miniature paintings. The process begins with the drawing, embossing jewelry in the dress and in the image cording or threading with semi-precious stones, and on top bond, the gold foils, after all, dyes are apply to affix colors to the figures.

Malwa, Deccan and Jaunpur schools of painting represents a fusion of the native and the Persian style, a different mode of painting, Lodi Khuladar,
flourished in the Sultanate’s power of North India extending from Delhi to Jaunpur. The style boomed in the Bahmani court and later in Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda, usually known as the Deccan school of Painting. The earliest one is the Tarif-i-Hussain Shahi, now in Bharatitihasa Samshodhaka Mandala, Pune, and the Nujum-ul-Ulum, Stars of Science, preserved in Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.

Mysore paintings, a celebrated tradition for grace, subdued colours, and paying special attention to theme. Subject matter was Hindu mythology and the process of making involves many stages like, preliminary sketch, ‘gesso paste’, incising the jewelry, relief or slightly raised effect of carving, gold foil pasting, and the final with water colors.

Rajasthani or Rajputana cover several sub schools of miniatures like Bundi, Kishangarh, Jaipur, Marwar Mewar and the Ragamala manuscripts and paintings on the walls of palaces, inner parts of the forts and ‘havelies’. Moreover, Madhubani, a style of painting, run through the Mithila region of Bihar state. Rajput advanced during the eighteenth century; the era of the ancient ended with the Mughals promoting manuscripts and miniatures emerged, developed and matured during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries.

Pattachitra refers to the folk painting of the state of Orissa and the tradition, intimately related with the devotion of Lord Jagannath, the Vaishnava cult and the subject matter is mainly from mythology, ‘puranic’ and folk. The painting provides vividness and solidity of hue, and minerals used for red, yellow, indigo and blue, and black from cocoanot shells. The brushes made of hair of domestic animals. A bunch of hair tied to the end of a bamboo stick make
the brush. This old tradition of Orissan painting continues to exist in Puri and Raghurajpur.\(^{viii}\) Havell, E. B., 1911

Mughal paintings, during sixteenth to nineteenth centuries were an exceptional blend of Indian, Persian and Islamic styles. Akbar’s control 1556-1605 under the supervision of two Persian artists, Mir Sayyed Ali and Abdus Samad served under the patronage of Humayun in Kabul and followed him to India. Numerous painters from Gujarat, Gwalior and Kashmir, also be the part of a new school of painting, the Mughal School. The Hamsanama painted on cloth, Persian safavi style with luminous red, blue and green colours prevails, the pink, battered rocks and the foliage, planes and blooming plum and peach trees be indication of Persia. Jahangir encouraged portraits and durbar scenes, and the foremost artists are Ustad Mansur, Abul Hasan and Bishandas. Shah Jahan’s era, famous artists are Mohammad Faqirullah Khan, Mir Hashim, Muhammad Nadir, Bichitr, Chitarman, Anupchhatar, Manohar and Honhar. During the period of Aurangzeb the notion of the concern declined.\(^{ix}\) (Tuli Neville, 1997).

**Schools, Institutes and movements in Modern India**

**Bengal School**

In the early twentieth century, The Bengal School of Art, a significant style of art, which was boomed against the European naturalism and allied with Indian nationalist movement uphold and carry by many British arts administrators. It cropped up as an ‘avant grade’ and pro-independence movement to counter the academic style subsequent to the extensive influence of Indian moral ideas from the West. E. B. Havel, the British art teacher’s effort to reform and encouraged to imitate Mughal miniatures at the Calcutta School.
led to a massive controversy, and criticism in journals and newspapers including nationalists. Abanindranath Tagore, Surendranath Ganguly and Nandalal Bose, supported E B Havel and highlighted a number of paintings influenced by Mughal art, a style that open the distinct spiritual qualities and opposed to the West. Abanindranath Tagore’s *Bharat Mata*, the *Mother India*, and *portray a young female with four arms in the mode of Hindu deities*, embraced objects to symbolically depict India’s national desire. Later he attempted to expand associates with Japanese artists as part of it to fabricate a ‘Pan Asianist’ movement. He and his celebrated neo-Bengal School artists advantaged the interaction and art promotion by the Kokka, the ‘National Essence’ is a dominant monthly magazine focused on East Asian, chiefly Japanese art and founded by the Kuki Ryuichi, the art patron, Tenshin Okakura (Kakuzo Okakura), the art critic and Asahi Shimbun editorial writer Takahashi Kenzo. His close students include Nandalal Bose, Surendranath Ganguly, Asit Kumar Haldar, SaradaUkil, Kshitidranath Majumdar, Samarendranath Gupta, Mukul Dey, K. Venkatappa, Jamini Roy, RanadaUkil and KalipadaGhosal. Jamini Roy was the background of folk art.\(^5\) (ChattopadhyaySwati, 2006.)

**The Progressive Artists Group**

PAG was formed soon after the independence at the behest of initiations by K. H. Ara, S. K. Bakre, H. A. Gade, M. F. Husain, S. H. Raza and F.N. Souza. However it was dissolved in 1956 and it was responsible for the concept of modern Indian art. Later Bal Chabda, Om Swami, V. S. Gaitonde, Krishen
Khanna, Ram Kumar, Tyeb Mehta and Akbar Padamsee are joined the PAG group. (Tuli, Ahmadabad, 1997).

**The Madras School**

During the British rule, Madras was recognized as a huge settlement in and around, they established an art institute in ‘George Town’, to provide the artistic prospect for Indians, as they found some capable and rational artistic intellectuals. Initially traditional artists or artisans were engaged to produce delicate varieties of furniture, metalwork, and ornaments for the imperial palaces of the Queen. In a very short spell, this set up established itself as the first school of art in India and it predates even the University of Madras. The Government College of Fine Arts formally known as the Madras School of Art, the oldest art institution in India was a private art school in 1850 by Alexander Hunter, a resident surgeon. In 1852 it was taken over by the government and named as the Government School of Industrial Arts. Later, it was renamed as Government School of Arts and Crafts and in 1962 again as Government College of Arts and Crafts. This institute offers courses of both Bachelor and Master’s degree in Fine Arts and it offers a new trend and style in modern Indian art. In 1928, Debi Prasad Roy Chowdhury became its vice principal and later its first Indian principal from 1929 to 1957. K.C.S Panicker succeeded him, and afterwards a number of noted artists that included, S. Dhanapal, R. Krishna Rao, K.L. Munuswamy, A.P. Santhanaraj, C.J. Anthony Doss and G. Chandrasekaran, who was served as its principal. The most prominent artists from the school are K.V.Haridasan, K.M. Adimoolam, R.B. Baskaran, Kanniappan, S. Dhanapal, KanayiKunjiraman, and Palaniappan. In 1966, K.C.S. Panicker, established
the ‘Cholamandal Artists’ Village, near Chennai along with his artists associate and students, still regarded as the biggest art moments’ in India. xii (Ibid, 1977)

The Calcutta School

This is one of the oldest Art colleges in India founded on August 16, 1854 as a private art school with the aim to set up an art institution for teaching industrial art scientifically. Later in the year 1864, it was renamed as the Government School of Art, and was taken over by the government and Henry Hover Locke joined as its principal and prepared a broad scheme of curriculum of studies in art. In 1885 M. Schaumburg became the new principal. An Italian artist O. Ghilardi joined as Assistant Principal in 1886.

E.B.Havel was appointed as principal of the institution from 1896 to 1905. He made efforts to restructure the syllabus focusing on Indian traditions and style. Percy Brown took over to officiate as principal from Abanindranath Tagore in 1909 and as principal up to 1927. In 1928, Mukul Chandra Dey happened to be its first Indian principal and in sixties and seventies it was Chintamani Kar from 1956. Prominent alumni of this school include Jogen Chowdhury, Sudip Roy and Pulak Biswas. The Bengal School had its decline with the arrival of modernist ideas in the 1920s.

Bombay School

J. J. School of Art is one of the oldest art institutions, founded in March 1857, named after Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeeboy, an executive and philanthropist. John Griffiths became the Principal of the School in 1865. He later became famous for copying the murals in the Ajanta Caves temple
complex, a project which lasted from 1872 to 1891, and in which the School’s students assisted. In 1866, it was taken over by the Government. Lockwood Kipling, a Professor of the School in 1865, established three sections-Decorative Paintings, Modeling, and Ornamental Wrought Iron Work. The present edifice, a neo Gothic architecture was designed by architect George Twigge Molecuy. In 1891 the Lord Reay Art set up Workshops, presently known as the Department of Art-Crafts. In 1910, the Sir George Clarke Studies and Laboratories were built for the advanced study of crafts, pottery for the first time in India. In 1935, the Commercial Art Department started. In 1958, the school separated into Department of Architecture as Sir J.J.College of Architecture and Department of Applied Art became Sir J. J. Institute of Applied Arts. Both the institutions were affiliated to University of Bombay in 1981. Akbar Padamsee, Bose Krishnamachari, Dadasaheb Phalke, Jatin Das, K.H.Ara, M.F. Husain, Laxman Pai, S. H. Raza, V.S. Gaitonde, K.K.Hebbar, F. N. Souza, Prabakar Kolte, Prabhakar Barve, Jeram Patel, Manu Parek and Tyeb Mehta were the major artists from the school.

**Baroda**

Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, one of the premier Institutes having Fine Arts as study subject, established in 1881 and it became a university in 1949 following national independence. The faculty of fine arts is one of the renowned and extensively treasured faculties all over the world, and produced prominent and legendary artists. The Fine arts faculty is considered the crown jewel in the M.S University and ranked one of the ‘top’ arts faculties in India. This art institute has the reputation to promote creative, individualist approach.
and historically stay to secularist, humanist, and modernist ideals. In 1881, Raja Ravi Varma was invited and treated with great respect by the princely state of Baroda by the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekward III. Hansa Mehta, then the Vice-Chancellor operated in a liberal, literal, and academic climate to ensure full intellectual growth, exploited her own resources to accommodate Markand Bhatt from the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia for initial set up in the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda. Key figures in modern Indian art included K.K. Hebbar, V.P. Karmarkar and the renowned Indianologist Hermann Goetz, N.S. Bendre and K.G. Subramanian invited to bond the innovative mission. In 1956 ‘The Baroda Group’, formed by the artists N.S. Bendre, Jyoti Bhatt, Prafull Dave, Shanti Dave, and K.G. Subramanian, continued with exhibitions that received attention throughout India and abroad. Laxma Goud, Nasreen Mohammedi, Sankho Chaudhuri, Bhupen Khakhar, Dhruva Mistry, Jeram Patel, Gulammohammed Sheikh, N. Pushpamala, Nagji Patel, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Rekha Rodwitty, N.S. Bendre, S. Ajaya Kumar, K.P. Soman, N.N. Rimzon, Alex Mathew, P.K. Nandakumar are the celebrities who passed out of the school.

**Delhi**

The College of Art, Delhi, a premier art college for advanced training in Visual Art- Creative and Applied Art, under the Faculty of Music & Fine Art, University of Delhi was established in 1942. Among its prominent takers include Ramendranath Chakravarty, B.C. Sanyal, Biswanath Mukherjee, O.P. Sharma, Anupam Sud, Manjit Bawa, Paresh Maity, V.G Abhimanue, Enas. M.J, Roy Thomas. The Annual Art Exhibition of the college is an important event in
the city’s Art calendar. In 2008, the college added new buildings and an auditorium, designed by architect Satish Gujral.

**Banaras Hindu University.**

Banaras Hindu University, one of the largest residential universities in Asia was founded in 1916 by Pandit Madan Mohan Malavaya and The Faculty of Visual Arts is one of the top institutions in Fine Arts. It attracts a noticeable number of foreign students. The Faculty opts for optimal interface with the outside world by conducting Art Fairs and Art Exhibitions frequently across the country. Many alumni of the Faculty are holding top positions as Designers, Painters, Sculptors, and Textile Designers. The Faculty endeavors to produce professionals with creative thinking who can play a positive role in society.

**Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi**

In the colonial environ two prevailing inclinations, the anti-colonial Islamic activism and the pro-independence objective of the political and radical intellectuals who were western educated Indian Muslims established Jamia Millia Islamia, an institution originally established at Aligarh in the United Provinces, India in 1920 and in 1936 was shifted to the new campus in Delhi.

**Santiniketan, Viswa Bharati, University/ Kala Bhavana**

Viswa Bharati was formally established in 1921. Nandalal Bose took charge of Kala Bhavana in 1922. Other important members of the institute are Abanindranath Tagore, Somnath Hore, K.G. Subramanian, Riten Majumdar, Nani Gopal Ghosh, Kanchan Chakravarty, Jayanta Chakravarty, Sanat Kar, Lalu
Prasad Shaw, Arun Pal, Jogen Chowdhury, Prof. Nirmalendu Das, Pinaki Barua
Siva Kumar and Sitansu Mukhopadhyaya.

Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata

Faculty of Visual Arts in Rabindra Bharati University was founded in
1972. It was established in the Tagore ancestral residence at Jorasanko, in
Kolkata

Sarojini Naidu School of Visual and Performing Arts, University of
Hyderabad

The University was established in 1974. The important members of the
institute are Prof. K. Laxma Goud, D.L.N. Reddy.

Chamarajendra Academy of Visual Arts (CAVA), University of Mysore

The University was established in 1906.

Chitrakala Parishad, Bangalore

The parishad was established in 1964.

Fine Arts College, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala University

The College was established in 1888. The important members are
Santhana Raj, Prof. C.L. Porinchukutty, Kanayi Kunzhiraman.


iv Chawla Rupika: 1993:146


vii Chatterjee Margaret (Edit), 1988, “Four Decades of Indian Art”, IIAS, Shimla.


