Chapter – XI

Art form the depth of self: Jogen Chowdhury and his works
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In the modern epoch, the resistance of the artist against the fundamental art principles, against the creative urge and even against his personal effort also proves itself in his approach to accomplishment and reputation. But these are an extension, socially, of the process which stimulated the conception of the self to be an artist. In this entire process, it begins with self-proposal as an artist of recognition. All the way through, the personal sphere of artist’s consciousness is connected to the surrounding nature as a myth. Artists occasionally experience the progression of their creativity stirring beyond them and leading into a foundation in nature from where they represent and exist in an innovative realm. Modern painting in its latest stage has not discarded the representation of familiar objects in principle, but it is the representation of the sort of space that identifiable objects can occupy. Abstract, or the non-figurative art is also a kind of representation that exists in the three dimensional space, and the barest proposition of a familiar entity to be sufficient to describe as relations with that sort of space. In the meantime, the other fundamental norms of the painting has begun with reconsideration in the inception of modernism and a new sphere is occupied with all these norms, in the interests of expression, meaning and interpretations, and also the fact that it turns to precede for radical applications.

In the late 1960s, the flow of revision was entrenched and associated with the notion that Indian modern art was being imitative. The result was the appearance of an Indian identity which was recreated and competent of absorbing the modern elements and trends of ‘isms’ to emerge with a new setup to motivate the artists.
“...modern Indian artists, although they accepted the realist aesthetic, never assumed a stolid objective realist position and, consequently, did not have to struggle hard to break out of its confines. Probably this also accounts for the lack of (or at least, the rarity) of any subsequent preoccupation on their part with problems of non-objective abstraction. They were satisfied to forge visually evocative images; their departure from reality was hardly drastic or complete; and when they used iridescence of colour similar to that of the impressionists or the interpenetration of planes similar to that of the Cubists, or simplifications or distortions of form, or linearities, or colour contrasts, their purpose and rationale were not comparable to those of their Western counterparts to whom these accrued out of an effort to dethrone the illusionistic objective-realist art concept that had held sway over their minds for over five centuries”.¹ (K.G.Subramanian, 1993.)

The look of the artist beyond the art, philosophy, creative inclination and even external input of his individual work, shows itself in his attitude towards accomplishment and eminence. These are an extension, socially, of the course of action which was subjective with his experience in art practices and creation of the personal self-image to be an artist. This creative process begins with the self as an artist and his reputation. These two dimensions of the individual are in persistent conflict throughout his life as an artist and it is relatively connected with in his profound equations, feelings for the relationship between things of seeing in the world. Nothing is isolated and exists separately from the rest. And it is combined with delightful moments of apparently isolated actions.
The Indian culture has been largely preoccupied with the true potential of substances of psyche, consciousness and spirituality within its nature. Jogen Chowdhury exhibited it through his drawings and paintings, a great deal of self-knowledge which arose from a profound source of understanding within. This aspect has reasonably continued to get vitality in all of his paintings.

Jogen Chowdhury was born in 1939. After spending several years as a practicing artist, Jogen Chowdhury is distinctively responsible, productive and also successful in his work. He is trying to differentiate between the personal and the transpersonal concepts in his visual language and it demands an incredible courage to devise a new path in modernity in the Indian context. A fantasy world is an added aspect of his painting to create a symbolic life, which one lives besides conjuring up dreams, day fantasies and the impulses from the unconscious. For him fantasy is life through the colour, black and white depositions which are rationally applied to specify the outlook of the subject matter. Fantasy is not just unusual for him, but comes really from the depths which give life a deeper meaning and also a deeper realization.

Through myths the inner domain of human consciousness is connected to the surrounding world of Jogen’s experience. The processes of his thoughts are emotive and beyond him, moving into a foundation in nature from which he draws his inspiration. His desire is implicit as the subjective struggle to give form, structure and practical expression to internal and external chaos and conflict. Conceptually strong, paintings of Johan represent an equally affluent experience.
and the depths of the psyche that have shaped suggestive images and dramatic inner revolutions.

The man-woman relationship has dominated the pictorial composition in Jorgen’s paintings. He uses all the qualities, necessary dramatic situations, the idea of heaviness, the weighted figure, the brooding body, the folds in the skin, and the cloth with obsessive perception. The magnetic forces acting down on the base, the earth, give the structure of his flabby flesh compositions with darkness that has many meanings. A woman’s face or a man, flowers, which are totally grey, a ‘still life’ with a dead butterfly, he has painted all these with the sense of natural depression. A sense of obsession of form, the dimension of form and its heaviness nurtured by lines, give meanings and create tension among viewers. He makes appearance with quality of non-appearance, images and non-images and form and formlessness to bring a definite and a sense of the infinite. He begins with a naturalistic sense of decoration, and a realistic approach with decorative elements, a bit of movement in figures and finally with dramatic situation in almost all the paintings.

It is an artist from a later generation, Jogen Chowdhury, has painted the moral corruption of the times that has found its finest artistic imagery. His obsession with the in-built tension of the line, has given rise to a focus on the intricacies of texture and its refined decorative possibilities.

“There are certain things in us which we cannot overcome,…a sense of obsession with form, the dimension of form, its heaviness, this is always with me,
even if I make a single line, my line gets that kind of tension”.- ii (Neville Tuli, 1993).

He evolved images in the ink and pastel medium, which have come closest to dissolving the notions of ugliness and beauty, vulgarity and making one realize the aesthetic potential of persuading one to stare at a gruesome reality, and yet remain in awe of its visual delight. His earlier works, Reminiscences of Dream Series (1967-1973) and Ganapathi Series (1973-74), gave way to even more exquisitely disciplined works such as Man on the Sofa (1976), Life I and II (1976-77) and Tiger in Moonlit Night (1978).

“He has developed a highly original idiom which allows him to explore a private world of real and imaginary beings, of dreams, fantasies, childhood recollections, as well as the objects and people he sees in his environment. Working in ink and pastel, he builds up his images through a fastidious process of cross-hatching, allowing a mild tint of colour gradually to seep in...In a series of dream-pictures, for instance, he has as it were, tried to plumb the depths of an abundantly fecund unconscious, coming up with images at once fantastic, archetypal and visually poetic”. iii (Deepak Ananth)

“Large and baggy bodies of men and women seem to have been distorted by the dark background that delineates their contours. Through literally thousands of cross-hatches Jogen brings out the sagging folds of their tired flesh, the flesh that suggests past experience, excesses and corruption... the most expressive symbol of corruption is a close-up of the fatigued woman, flesh which often seems to hide a process of decomposition just beneath the surface”. iv (Santo Datta, 1982-83)
Jogen Chowdhury’s highly instinctive aesthetic discipline matured his intricate play with linear textures into a technique that could transform notions of ugliness, decay, corruption, and shallowness, into an erotic design of line and its inner tension. As Jogen clarifies:

‘A certain tension is most essential in art work which is the result of the total effect of composition, colour and rhythm or sensitive lines...I do not agree that it is only ‘speed’ which creates such tension (Ramkinkar’s view), but it is ‘stillness’ which can be created even greater tension in a work of art...Aesthetic tension in an art work is very different from an ‘expression of speed’. Speed is not necessarily important for a painting, or an art form, but tension is important’ -\(^{1}\) (Jorgen’s diary, 1980).

The very notions of beauty are twisted wide open amid his unique vision. The inner sense of distortion which he has continued to evolve in his figures, revealed an erotic un-fulfillment, merging the vulgar and the refined, the sensuous and the dead, the shy and the obsessive, the universal and Indian.

The following paintings of Jogen Chowdhury are selected for the study to assess his contribution to the modern Indian art.

Plate number 1 is one of the paintings of ‘Ganapati Series’. In this painting, with a black background, there is a yellow coloured ‘Ganesh’ with his secret code of arms and armories along with a rat as ‘Vahana’. Formally abstracted, but the aged figure of the God retained in the dark, creates a fantasy rather than a spiritual expression. The breathless yellow colour also generates a bloodless scheme to the content of representation.
Plate number 2 ‘Wounded man’ is a composition of a human being on suffering from pain in his body and head. Intentionally Jogen created the aching man with wounds on the shoulder, forehead and lower jaw placed in a breathless space with body twisted within the space. Monochromatic effects are displayed through pale yellow generating a detention of the viewer’s mind.

Plate number 3, ‘Blue Sari’ and 4 ‘Waiting for Her Lover’ are figurative paintings of Jogen Chowdhury that signify female figures. The first one is orange coloured negative plane that has portrayed a woman in blue sari along with a tiger embossed on another sitting female figure. At the end portion, the blue sari and her hair are flying in the air by which Jogen created an immense movement, and the white stripped yellow tiger is looking at the light orange woman, creating the act of harshness. In the other painting, a mature woman is waiting for her lover in yellow sari placed deliberately adjacent to a pillar with a flower. A pleasant landscape is illustrated behind the negative plane. It resembles Ravi Varma’s painting, which Jogen Chowdhury depicts with a remarkable romantic sensation.

Plate numbers 5, and 6 are also female figurative paintings of Jogen; the first one is a blue coloured ‘nude’ on yellow background. Stylistically drawn and painted, the woman is sitting in backside-view with white colour patches of uneven brushing in the entire body and the combed and warped hair appears appealing and erotic. The other is a half ‘nude’ woman lying on her bed. There is a voluptuous figure of the woman with open breast, twisted hands and legs, curly hair and drapery and entirely decorative delineation in composition with black
monochromatic effect, showcasing Jogen Choudhury’s grace in developing a new style derived by himself in Indian contemporary painting.

For the subject matter, he chooses the drawings of human figures, flowers, leaves creepers, birds and other natural surroundings of connected forms, deliberately made with an ironic connotation of lines. Their energy, movement and delicate vibrations were the focal individualities of Jogen Chowdhury. The figures are exposed with supernatural eyes; their postures and the dramatic spirit of the form and style produce a powerful expression of the subject matter in almost all his works. Essence of unusual syntax for highlighting the erotic in conjunction with physical beauty and the intensity of the form with disproportion, inelegance and oddity of perfection are also packed in his paintings.

These realities through myths reflect the inner domain of human consciousness; they are connected to the environment Chowdhury lived in. The progressions of his judgments are emotional and in addition to his impulses, are obsessed by nature alongwith self-consciousness and motivation. His aspiration is understood as the individual incentive to provide forms, its organization and manifestation to inner and peripheral turmoil and encounter. Essentially Jogan Chowdhury’s solid images with the essence of disproportion, embody an ironic involvement and the complexities of the consciousness that have formed expressive metaphors and intense innermost revolts. Thus Chowdhury’s paintings are visual expressions from the depth of self-sensibility and a native sense of sensuality and rhythm, which formed as a type of modulation in the modern sense of Indian contemporary painting concept of representation and it was pursued beyond the
emotional response to Plato’s ancient aesthetic principal theory of ‘mimesis’ and the ‘Sadrisya’ or similarity in the Indian context.


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Datta Santo, ‘Visitations, Art Heritage Journal 2, 1982-83

Jogen Choudhury

Plate No. 1 and 2

Ganesh

Wounded Man

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Plate No. 5 and 6