Chapter – XII
Trans-mimetic presentation of life-world in Sujata Miri’s works
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“Mimesis”, the term conveys the imitative representation of nature and human behaviour in art and literature. However, the ‘mimesis’ expresses that the representations of nature or human behaviour should be accurate imitations. Representation is a concern fundamental to the visual arts. From all types of images like paintings, drawings, sculpture, photographs, computer-generated images, diagrams, charts, and graphs, from real to abstract, representations are omnipresent. Similarly, after spending much of the twentieth century in memorable exploration as abstraction and as formalist aesthetics reigned supreme, representation has returned to an unusual extent to contemporary visual art. Representational photography, video and ever-evolving forms of new media now figure significantly in the globalized art world, while this turned effort of representation in the traditional media of painting and sculpture.

In visual arts, these representational concerns have been perceived as different in and as objects of detached intellectual traditions. Scientific reproduction and theorizing have been topics of intense deliberations in the twentieth century philosophy of science in the analytic tradition, while representation of the real and ideal has never moved far away from the core humanist concerns of art historians. Representation has polarized into resistance between mimesis and convention. Mimesis understands some notion of mimicry or similarity, resemblance or imitation as the core of representation and such mimetic views stand in harsh contrast to conventionalist accounts of representation, which observe voluntary and arbitrary stipulation as the core of representation. Infrequent exceptions only
establish the rule that mimesis and convention preside over current thought of representation in both analytic philosophies of science and studies of visual arts.

This juxtaposition can barely be dismissed as a matter of mere coincidence. In fact, philosophy of science and the history of art have increasingly found themselves trespassing into the realm of the other area to get ideas and approaches to representation. Aware of the limitations of the accounts of representation accessible within the field, philosophers of science have begun to look apparently towards the rich traditions of thoughts about representation in the visual and literary arts. Simultaneously, in art history and allied fields like visual studies it has come to observe that images generated in scientific perspectives are not simply interesting illustrations derived from ‘high art’, but as refined visualization techniques that challenge our inward conceptions of representation, mimesis and aesthetics.

“A mimetic representation attempts to bring into being an exact copy of reality. Mimetic studies of landscape have been criticized by claims that, there is no neutral, univocal, visible world out there to match our vision against”–(M. Duncan and E. Ley).\footnote{1}

If a work of art is mimetic, it may closely resemble a real-life object. Subsequently the principal concept in philosophy of art is transformed into a trans-mimetic condition in meaning and application in art, especially in visual arts, advocated by the artists of the contemporary world.

"Mimesis was seldom the only purpose of art, but always a central one: to make pictures look ‘real.’ After photography, however, all this changed.”– (Richard Nilsen).\footnote{2}
The focused issues look over the subjective nature of artistic interpretation through the notion of mimesis as a process or transformation of material, the experience of the place, improvement of the idea or concept and the creation of the art work in response. An investigation of the notion of landscape, people and their life as cultural reflection also is the part. These are a cultural construct, and historically surfacing ideal manifest in painting, prints and drawings. These creations or images, have meanings which make representations of cultural ideals. The Western and other influences reflected in the paintings of artists who convey the early mission of modernity into ‘modern’ demonstration of these types. The medium of the mirror offers the opening to advocate aspects of a cultural reflection and an attentiveness of identity that has relevance to contemporary Indian art. Therefore, its responsibility in mimesis, as a reflection in an imitative sense is established, along with its re-figurative character, in which the similarities between the original and the reformed rely further on correlative causes than representation. The formation and development of a narrative connecting reflections move throughout modernity both in the visual presentation of the life world in many of the Indian contemporaries like Sujata Miri.

Sujata Miri’s works, the creative body of her paintings reflect many interpretations and responses to painstaking issues. The metaphor implied by her, the use of the new elements as agents of enclosure also refers to the capacity of the individuality and confined by notional boundaries and provisional practices where totalizing systems of contemplation dictate theoretical debates.
“Metaphor is not only an essential process and product of thought, but also that art is metaphor.” - T.R. Fehrenbach

Sujata’s images represent the implicit meanings with the concept of restricted space, where the spectator moves from one physical space to another and from one stage of advance to a further. The treat of her paintings becomes the position where a revolution can take place, a metaphor for the mimetic process where the initial experience is translated and transformed into the final trans-mimetic result. Her paintings discharge the role of results on the surface of the echo, untying the initial experience from the practices of memory, reflection and supposition. Most of her works portrayed an attention to the materiality to represent and offer the break for innovative insights and experiences. It also allows the subjective nature of artistic activity to combine symbolic elements relating to the position, resulting in the creation of meaning in her paintings.

As a professor in philosophy, interested in teaching, guiding research in North- East India and its culture, she made a generous contribution to the writing on history and philosophy of India and a reputed artist of contemporary Indian art scene. She has several books to her credit - Religion and Society: North-East India, An Introduction to the Study of Tribal Religions and The Khasi Milieu, The Khasi World View: A Conceptual Exploration, Communism in Assam: A Civilizational Approach, Rationality and Tribal Thought (Editor), Stories and Legends of the Liangmai Nagas, Paintings on Themes from North-East India. (Sujata Miri)⁴. Sujata has also published two novels - Days and Nights and The Broken Circle, besides many articles in professional journals. During the mid-1990s, Sujata was awarded a
Fellowship by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research to work on “Ethics and Environment”. The work was an enquiry of the idea of ‘man-nature continuum’ within tribal cultures. At the same time, Sujata took to painting.

“She found that while the ratiocinate method is one possible way of exploring the tribesman’s thought and ideas, it was inherently inadequate in many ways and painting provided a much more “articulate” and insightful method. Sujata painted intermittently as a young woman, but it was in Shimla while working on her book on environment that she began to realize her potential as a painter. She produced in very quick succession a series of paintings on “tribal themes” interspersed with a few based on somewhat different ideas”. – (Web Source.)

Sujata, the artist, has selectively used to explore accounts of native North-Eastern culture of India to enhance her artistic representations. The subject matter of those works became an important means of preserving knowledge of tribal cultures, in a way. The cultural preservation was of a larger significance in her works, both in paintings and books to reach the goal. The artist utilized an account of Indianness to create a new indigenous identity. The non-geometric paintings of Sujata, are balanced between a cultural imperative for personal innovation and submission to the constraints of traditional people, their place and life. The experimental samples of the mystic landscape with the expression of a special kind of the figures using a rule-based approach reveals the additional variables in the modern art hypothesis, associating female stylistic uniformity with number of elements and rules used for a ‘higher position’.
The following paintings of Sujata Miri are selected for the study and evaluated her contribution to the modern Indian art scene.

Plate number 1, ‘Man Looking without Seeing’ is a painting of Sujata Miri; it is an impression of a male figure bearing a resemblance to a folk art image. Depicting profile in an innocent fashion, she deliberately incised the figure in off-white tone of flesh tint on touch of bluish background. Corresponding to a kid’s intention, Sujata portrayed eyes, nose, mouth, ear and hair with strong outlines and the feeling of the man looking outside towards nature more than seeing himself.

Plate number 2- like the first painting Sujata rendered, is a ‘female deity’ symbolized with folk representation. The Mother Goddess image is represented with twisted hair with stones and pebbles, white large eyes and necklace, blue lips and neck-string in addition to circled breasts and small navel portion and the entire deity is splattered with pink colour against the pinkish blue background depicting the life and culture of the world around artist herself.

Plate number 3- ‘She Turned into a Bird’ is again a female nude figure with relatively more realistic approach of representation of a story of the ‘land-living tradition’ in the Northeast India. This shows how the artist has visually expressed the substance of the saga of a female turned into a bird represented in pale yellow colour within the background of bluish sky in conformity with celestial bodies.

Plate number 4- In this painting again Sujata conveys a different tale in her visual expression. ‘She Fell in Love with the Tree God’ represents a gorgeous landscape of North-east India and her love for the Tree God. The entire painting is flushed with colour and forms of nature- hills, sky, river and greenery in company
with two figures of male and female narrating a mimetic substance into a sizeable imaginative content of her own environment.

Plate number 5: In this painting too Sujata has created visual representations on a different tale of her land. The fiction is narrated into visual forms of reddish green hills, undulated terrains with peaks and green trees and bluish raining sky. ‘The Beheading’ which is symbolic metaphor of deforestation articulates not only a tale but the anger of resistance through colours and images of an artist and her faith in Mother Nature.

Sujata Miri, is an artist of land and its dreams with the pleasure, pure and deep on her colour and absolutely personal and immoral tactic subject matter. She is so much entrenched and about the life and world around her. This is depicted along with compassionate imagery and symbolism. Her haunting imagination is filtered into a reaction towards a new vocabulary in modern Indian image making inspired by nature, tales of her land and from within herself. Though she took up painting as a profession recently, her early development as a professor of philosophy was inclined towards contemporary art. Sujata sought not to be influenced by any conventions and her art is closer to nature. She found freedom and quietness in Shillong, where she soon became the chief figure of contemporary art of Northeast India. It is in this isolated region that she developed the distinctive symbolic and primitive elements of her painting. Inspired by folklore and folk art, she began to paint simplified shapes profoundly outlined by dark colours. She does not glorify her fears in her painting but indeed her world is one of harsh reality, it may snap strictly resemble a real- life objective. Accordingly, Sujata has transformed the
representational impression of ‘mimesis’ held by Plato into a trans-mimetic notion of her own conception and its representational elements in her paintings have added a new trend to contemporary Indian art.
i M. Duncan and E. Ley.
iv Miri Sujata (Published) Paintings on Themes from North-East India
v Miri Sujata, Catalogue, published in Website (Sujata Miri.in).
Plate No. 1, 2 and 3

Man looking without seeing

Female Deity

She turned into a bird
She fell in love with the Tree God

The Beheading

Plate No. 4 and 5