Rising Above the Human

One of the most extensively practiced religions in the world, Christianity was born in the crucible of religions in the area now known as Middle East. This religion was a reaction to and in a way reinterpretation of the system of belief initiated by Moses the prophet of the Jews. Christianity bases itself on the life and teachings of Jesus called Christ, the anointed one or Messiah whom Christians believe to be the son of God in a human incarnation and to be a savior of humanity. That Christianity was derived from Judaism is clear from the holy book Bible which is common to both Judaism and Christianity. The Hebrew Bible consists of two sections The Old Testament and The New Testament. The books of the Old Testament were as much sacred scripture for Christians as for Jews though in time Christians added books of their own to form the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, the first and the last books of Genesis and Revelation have been the most important sources of Christian mythology. The first eleven chapters of Genesis describe the:

- Creation of the universe and man
- Coming of evil into the world which God had made
- Temptation of serpent for Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden
- Expulsion of Adam and Eve and the origin of work and death
- First murder when Cain killed his brother Abel
- Wickedness of man, which caused God to send the flood
- Saving of Noah, his family and the animals
- How the different languages came into existence

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God’s punishment to the building of the Tower of Babel by confusing the tongues of men and scattering them over the earth.272

The New Testament focuses on the story of Jesus and events related to it. It is believed that God, the Father, sent Jesus Christ (the Son of God) into the world so that the world might be saved through him. Jesus is the Word, which was with God in the beginning, and was God. The Word was made flesh and took anthropomorphic form. God caused an Israelite virgin named Mary to become pregnant miraculously. Mary was the mother of this child, but there was no earthly father who had caused her to become pregnant. This child was named Jesus273. He was the Son of God, who had now become fully human as well.

In Christianity painting and sculpture had a major role in so much as that images have often played a part in the Christian religious experience; it has also influenced architecture through buildings dedicated to worship and through the founding of religious communities. But for the Fathers of the Church the problem of images and their role in religious experience arose from the conflict between the two traditions: the Hebraic and the Greco Hellenistic, which had assumed opposing attitudes with respect to the function of images in religious experience. According to available sources, St Gregory of Nyasa, emphasized the beauty of places of worship as an element of great importance to religious experience274. Even though some thinkers came out clearly in support of the Christian imagery, during the period of the growth of the religion, overwhelming majority of the Church men spoke forcefully against any such use. Pope Gregory, 545 AD, in the Council of Trent

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273 Many years before Jesus appeared on the earth, there had been prophecies which foretold of him. While on the earth, he fulfilled all the prophecies concerning him. Ibid p. 105
came out forcefully in favor of the use of religious images and legends in Churches for he likened them as akin to the printed word to which only a few people had access.

With the declaration of Christianity as the official religion by the Roman emperor Constantine in 326AD, the Christian painting which had till then remained confined to the walls of the catacombs (underground burial chambers) saw the light of the day and gradually painting became an integral aspect of Church architecture. Early mosaics survive in places like Ravenna etc. Later however a number of paintings were made and some of them can be still see in situ primarily during the Gothic period in 12th c-13thc.\textsuperscript{275} For the Renaissance and for centuries afterwards the central focus of all representational art remained the imaging of the truths of the Christian faith, when the whole field of religious iconography was reinterpreted in the new artistic style. In the last quarter of the 19th century various symbolist artists turned to Christianity as a source of inspiration particularly the Pont Aven school\textsuperscript{276} led by Paul Gauguin ,and such painters as Maurice Denis and Paul Serusier produced an art filled with a strong mystic religious feeling\textsuperscript{277}. Interestingly symbolistically inclined artists of the late 19th and 20th centuries took recourse to Christian themes as a source for personal inspiration and expression. At this point the Church had also begun to use serious contemporary artists such as Denis and ,later, Georges Rouault for mural work. Such personal expressions however could be clearly distinguished from the work designed for the churches. But a large number of modern painters such as Andre Bauchant, Georges Rouault, Emil Nolde ,and Rico Lebrun have made

\textsuperscript{275} Ibid p. 588
\textsuperscript{276} The French village of Pont ~Aven in Brittany, had attracted artists since the 1860s.Gaugain was the major force behind the Pont Aven avant-garde School of painting. Cat: Exhibition, Gauguin and the School of Pont Aven ,Int. Bretell Richardm,1997
\textsuperscript{277} Le Paul Charles-Guy Paul Judy le , Gaugin and the Impressionists at Pont Aven ,p. 211 Abbeville Press, 1987.
effective use of Christian themes as a personal expression as also for ecclesiastical needs. This distinction between a personal art derived from Christian inspiration and an officially sponsored Christian art is underlined by the fact that prominent Jewish artists have also dealt with these themes eg. Marc Chagall, as for instance in 'White Crucifixion', 1938, along with Jacques Lipchitz and Abraham Rattner. While all the painters interpreted the narrative of Christ in a personal way the Church paintings were to an extent more graphic and narrative oriented.

In the Asian context perhaps some of the earliest Christian paintings can be seen in the Buddhist monastery in Mongolia. There are 14 paintings in all. There is one that shows a Nestorian cross placed on lotus petals the Good Shepherd presented as Bodhisattva. Thomas Mani as Buddha and the four Hindu Gods. (possibly 3rd century AD) .

It has been recorded that in India a Dominican missionary Jordan Catalari of Severac who worked along the west coast of India from Gujarat to Kerala from 1321 to the late 1320's built a few churches for the later Christian communities. Bishop John Maringolli decorated one such church with a number of paintings. Since no works in situ are available, it is difficult to speculate as to their style. Some sculptures however are available through which the style of Christian sculpture in India during this period can be discerned. But references to sculptural images begin to abound around the 14th c. while according to literary sources sculptures of saints etc. were present in India even during the 12th century. AD. A contemporary account refers to "idols" in the houses of Christians living near the Church of Mylapore Tamil Nadu. Besides which there are many altar crosses, ornate outdoor crosses and so on.


which have been placed pre 16th century. It is interesting to note that while the iconography is completely Christian, but the design on their bases and the carvings on them are markedly Hindu in style. Most of these decorations were commissioned by bishops and prelates. During the Portuguese period when in 1510 the Portuguese established their base in Goa, a number of impressive churches were built. The paintings and carvings in these churches laid a solid foundation for Indian Christian art. This founding of Christian art was also due, not in a small measure, to the increasing contact of Europe and India. Since with the increasing trade relations between India and Europe an increasing number of visitors and traders from Europe came to India, it is more than likely that a few works of art must have been brought from there to India.

Akbar developed serious and strong interest in Christianity in 1573 when he met Pedro Tavares, a Portuguese delegate who visited Akbar’s court at Fatehpur Sikri and initiated Akbar’s interest in Christianity. He also told him about Julian Pereira, the Portuguese priest-in-charge of Satgaon who was later invited to Fatehpur Sikri. On his recommendation, Akbar invited a few Christian scholars to the Mughal capital. It resulted in the arrival of the first Jesuit mission under the leadership of father Rudolph Aquaviva with Francis Henriquez and Antony Monserrate. With the arrival of the mission a new period of intercourse between Muslim India and the Christian world began. The learned Fathers preached people about their religion in the small chapel.

280 Ibid p. 503
281 There were constructed in Goa hundreds of Churches, Chapels, wayside crosses and statues, monasteries and comments in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. For example 25 churches in Ilhas 25 in Salcete, 7 in Marmugao, 27 in Bardez and dozens in other locations including Old Goa, other Portuguese territories also had their own share of churches in these centuries. Menechery, George in the reproduction of “Pfr. Menachary Paper and Articles under the title of “Christian Contribution to Art and Architecture in India. An Illustrated Guide to Goa. Furtado note no. 25 1922(pp183ff)
282 Kumar Asok Das, Mughal Painting During Jahangir’s Time, p 229, Calcutta, 1978
283 Verma Som Prakash, Painting the Mughal Experience, p. 131, 2005
of Fatehpur Sikri where many people went to look at the large pictures of Christ, the Virgin and the Saints which were hung. The famous pictures of the Madonna and the Adoration of the Magi were imported. The arrival of these paintings, engravings and illustrated books of a new style opened up a new horizon to the artists of the Mughal studio. Akbar was so fascinated by the characteristics, so different from what he had been accustomed to, particularly of the treatment of colours and line modeling as also a perspective space that he asked some of his court painters to copy these works. Some of his painters like Basawan, Sanwala, and Miskin are recorded as having done so. Slowly their works began to show occasional introduction of European figures and an understanding of the techniques of shadowing, depiction of perspective and effective modelling. This practice was encouraged during the time of Jahangir. A number of works copied and coloured by Kesavdas from European engravings or drawings are available. In fact, Kesavdas’s name is closely associated with colored copies of European works. A few miniatures of excellent quality faithfully copied from European engravings or over painted directly on the originals are also preserved. The best known example is from the Wantage Album in the Victoria Museum which shows a copy of Jerome Wierix’s the Martyrdoms of St. Cecillia.\(^{284}\) In Jahangir’s atelier, the impact of European art became even more apparent because the painters were not happy with the repetitive use of the same motifs and at that time they sought to make a great effort to create a new iconography for which the European religious motifs and symbolism were of great use to them. Regular sessions of religious discussions were held in the evening where Christian pictures were picked for initiating prolonged discussions of them. Large number of European pictures were not only

\(^{284}\) See St. Jerome, c 1580, Gouche on paper ascribed to Kesavadas, ibid. pl.35
collected with enthusiasm but also studied with interest. Many European engravings were coloured or copied, in some cases with minor variations by Jahangir's painters. We get many examples of these paintings. The Muraqqa-e-Gulshan also has two fine pictures coloured by artist Nadira Banu.\textsuperscript{285}

A consideration of the works by the above mentioned artists reveals that apart from a familiarity with new stylistic feature the painters also became familiar with iconographical symbols and this practice continued during Shah Jahan's time and even later. A known painter in this era was Nini whose name was written on the lower mount in what appears to be Shah Jahan's handwriting. Figures of the Madonna and child are also found on a folio of the Gulshan Album which appears to be a slightly altered version of a copy of the world famous painting in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.\textsuperscript{286} Some other examples like the pictures of the Holy family with St John and Women and Angels at the Tomb of Christ can also be seen.

The interest in Christian themes appears to have waned during the late years of the Mughal dynasty except in the decorations of the churches interestingly even though the power and suzerainty of the colonial powers, by and large Christians, became paramount in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Christianity came to India in a major way where its missionary method was pioneered by William Carey in Bengal and stress was laid on literature particularly the Bible and Christian education. The fine arts appear to have been neglected to come extent for as compared with the earlier period there appears less interest in music, drama, feasts and festivals. However extensive information is available through company paintings of the life style of the Europeans, the portraits of their Khidmatgars etc but very little reference is available

\textsuperscript{285} Ibid p.133
\textsuperscript{286} Kumar Asok Das, \textit{Mughal Painting During Jahangir's Time}, p237, Calcutta, 1978

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to the execution of Christian paintings. Some indirect reference however is available from the accounts of Lady Dufferin who visited the house of the ex-king, Wajid Ali Khan, of Lucknow at Calcutta after his death. She describes a room as "...The walls, however were covered with pictures of questionable French prints and Scripture subjects mixed indiscriminately." This establishes the presence of Christian paintings in India in the late 19th century.\textsuperscript{287} In a set of mica paintings dated ca.1851 there is also a representation of ‘A Roman Catholic Procession at Pondicherry’.\textsuperscript{288}

A large number of examples of Christian painting however start becoming available from the 2nd half of the 19th century making it possible to make a systematic study of their form and content. One of the first such examples is a work painted by Raja Ravi Varma, a painter renowned for his interpretations of Hindu epical and mythopoetical narrative and the adaptation of stylistic features of European art of the early 19thc. One such example is of Judith\textsuperscript{289} an Old Testament character who is a daring and beautiful widow, upset with her Jewish countrymen for not trusting God to deliver them from their foreign conquerors. In this work we see Judith shown half naked, her face in profile, as she stands firmly on the ground while awaiting with an expression of hauteur and anticipation the approaching Jews. She rests lightly on a sword which she holds at her back with determination. In the treatment of the body, in the deep chiaroscuro, and the footwear the stylistic derivation from European sources is clear. The long cascading dark hair, the nude torso and the faintly discernible anklets

\textsuperscript{287} Mildred and Archer W.G, Indian Painting for the British, 1770-1880, p.59, London 1955
\textsuperscript{288} Ibid p. 82
\textsuperscript{289} Mago Pran Nath, Contemporary Art In India A Perspective, p 27, India, 2000
are however specifically Indian features, making this work an early examples of indigenizing a Christian theme and giving it a local reference. The work also has certain marked characteristic which root it solidly in the Indian, or even specifically Kerala context. The small but clearly defined silhouettes of the ornamental features which are broadcast over the background identify some of them as being heraldic devices of the house of Travancore.

In Bombay number of painters worked on the theme of Christ. Antonio Xavier Trindade a renowned Goan painter was one such painter. His work ‘Crucifixion’ painted in oil on paper is dated 1921. The figure of Christ appears to have been derived from the Nordic traditions specifically in the somewhat tortured and agonised expression on the face. The figure has the typical iconographic representation as the nails on the hand. Unlike the Nordic representation there is no feeling of horror or violence. His painting, ‘The woman washing Christ’s Feet’, painted in 1923 we see a woman washing the feet of Christ who sits on a chair surrounded by two of his disciples with two women watching the event. In composition, organisation and expressiveness of the figures and specifically in the atmosphere of quietude that is generated, the work is strongly redolent of later Renaissance traditions. Both these works

290 Antonio Xavier Trindade born in 1870 and died in 1935, he was a renowned Goan painter. After studying in Sir J.J. School of Arts, Mumbai he began teaching in addition to the work he did with Raja Deen Dayal, a leading photographer as a commissioned painter of portraits.

291 www.amazon.com
bespeak clearly of the various influences that Trindade imbibed and utilized in his work.

In later years Angela Trinidade, daughter of Antonio Xavier Trinadade with the inheritance of her father behind her painted Christ's life in the Ajanta style, a wide step away from the Western techniques of her father, often called the Rembrandt of the East. Later she changed and painted in triangular forms. She explains this to be the result of a religious experience she had. Now she wants to express everything in this triangular trinitarian form.\(^{292}\)

In Calcutta as well the members of the modern renaissance movement showed great interest in Christ in the late 19\(^{th}\) century early 20\(^{th}\) c. and thus sought to reject the obscurantist beliefs and replace them with certain clearly definable features. The Tagore family, the initiator and the main inspiration of the Group was very much influenced by Brahmo Samaj, a reformist movement. It is thus surprising that hardly any works by the painters of the Bengal School on Christian themes are available perhaps because their main concern remained consistently with understanding and reliving Indian Tradition in both philosophy, ethic and the arts. However Gaganendranath Tagore made serious attempts to come to terms with modern European art while simultaneously striving for a personal style. In his painting, **Christ in the Church** we see a spiritual glow on the face of the pious devotee who is playing on a piano. Christ is placed against a spectral cross which seems to rise from a vaporous background. Three lighted tapers create a dramatic chiaroscuro a pronounced stylistic characteristic of

Gaganendranath Tagore, in which the face of Christ appears to be formed of pure light. Another candle on the piano defines the pious devotee who is playing on it. A staircase emerging from infinity serves as a threshold that connects the two. So that from the back and rising up towards it appears almost as if the devotional prayer had invoked the divine presence. In this work Gaganendranath captures in a highly expressive manner the relationship between the divine and the devotee.

In Shantiniketan great interest developed in Christian themes. For Nand Lal Bose a student of Abanindranath Tagore Christ became a motif to which he consistently returned. His interest in Christian themes can be seen in his many copies of Raphael's 'Madonna'. He seems to have become fascinated by the symbol and import of the cross, and frequently repeated it in many paintings. One such painting is 'Christ Carrying The Cross' painted in 1945. The legend speaks of presence of women during Jesus' journey to the cross: Veronica, Mary Magdalen or the more anonymous 'daughters of Zion'. In the work the artist shows us Christ stumbling under the burden of the cross. The clothes of Jesus makes the work even more remarkable, as he is presented wearing a lungi, the customary loin cloth worn by the poorest Indians or agriculture laborers. The work can thus be interpreted as one in which Christ takes upon himself the suffering of the poor of the world becoming in the process one with them. Due to his impact representations of Christ on the cross and his passion, his love of the humble and the low, along with the representation of the incarnation (Christ and his mother Mary) became for many an artist the medium through which they would express their own ideals and struggle, their experiences and insights in due course.

It is striking that the majority-

293 Schouten ,Jan Peter, Jesus as Guru: The image of Christ among Hindus and Christian in India.Vol 36 of currents of encounter.p. 159 ,Rodopi,2008
possibly even all- of his paintings of Christ depict the crucifixion. Some Christian artists were trained in Santiniketan who later started the process of indigenizing of Indian Christian painting. The works of Angelo de Fonseca, Vinayak S. Masoji, A.D. Thomas and are important in this context.

Angelo Da Fonseca, painted Last Supper, in 1940. In this work Da Fonseca introduces a number of elements which are not a part of the Christ iconography of this theme, Instead of around a table, Christ and his disciples sit on the floor with Indian thalis before them. In the background is a lit bronze lamp. In another departure from the usual representation is that along with Christ his disciples have a halo at their heads as well. The figure of Christ is placed in the centre holding a bowl in his hand which possibly captures the Eucharist when Christ took the bread and the wine and giving it to his disciples said, “This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And then he took the cup of wine, sharing it with his disciples and said, “This wine is the token of God’s new covenant to save you— an agreement sealed with the blood I will pour out for you”. He also told all of them, “I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom.”

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294 Richard W. Taylor, Jesus in Indian Paintings, Confessing the Faith in India, p. 58 Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1975
Vinayak S. Masoji\textsuperscript{297} painted, modelled, worked with leather, wood and in batik. He wanted to express a message that India could understand. In the Mughal style of painting he found a method suitable to tell stories, in his case to retell biblical events in an Indian setting.\textsuperscript{298} In his painting 'Wearied Jesus'\textsuperscript{300} painted in 1967 we see the use of a broad brush. Christ is shown weary of the inequities of the world. And yet within this understanding he retains his calm and quietude as the face instead of being agonized is tranquil. Interestingly the forehead of Christ bears some brush strokes which look very much like the third eye on the forehead of Shiva.

A.D. Thomas,\textsuperscript{299} was another student of Nand Lal Bose, one of the unique features of the work of A.D. Thomas is his adoption of Buddhist forms for such themes. In his pictures everything is Indian: the landscape, the surroundings, the symbols and image; Jesus is painted as a guru, a spiritual leader in his gestures and dress. His best known work is a series of pictures on the life of Christ. Very Indian in concept as well as technique is his \textit{Madonna and Child}\textsuperscript{300} where the baby Christ rests on the curve of a tree as he is lovingly held by his mother. While the figures are clearly defined the tree and background is softly handled in

\textsuperscript{297} Vinayak S. Masoji, born 1897, at Kolhapur, a member of the United Church of Northern India, studied at Shantiniketan, and became the Director of its Kalabhavan.
\textsuperscript{298} Ibid, p. 494
\textsuperscript{299} A.D. Thomas was trained in the atelier of Nand Lal Bose at Kala Bhavan is eminently clear in his use of delicate lines and soft forms. While the figures are clearly defined the tree and background is softly handled in colour.
\textsuperscript{300} Ramachandra Rao P R, in Modern Indian Painting p. 27, Rachna, Madras, 1953.
colour. Many have raised theological doubts about his works criticizing his Christ as being too Hindu or Buddhist or even effeminate. Jamini Roy who was trained in the Western academic painting styles initially worked in the Post-Impressionist genre of portraits and landscapes. In the 1920s, he became inspired by the lines and palette of paintings (pattas) sold in bazaars outside of the Kalighat temples in Bengal. He soon developed his unique method for the revival of indigenous painting traditions, as homage to the folk painters of his native Bengal often depicting the Puranic gods and epics.\textsuperscript{301} Towards the end of 1940 when he embarked upon the most significant phase of his career, he took upon Christ as a symbol of the suffering humanity. His painting \textit{Christ} painted in 1940 presents the face of the Christ as reduced to the simplest elements, becoming almost an ideogram, and the very austerity of line, color and form makes of him an apt analogy of the present day suffering world.\textsuperscript{302} A more intense interpretation of the motif can be seen in \textit{Christ} of 1962 were we see Christ holding a cross on his shoulder. Against the sharpness and clarity of the earlier image the treatment here becomes more abstract, even though the calm pose, faintly indicated small beard long neck and hands, and the tall staff are enough graphic details for an easy recognisability like cross in his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{301} "Roy noted that the art of Metropolitan Calcutta, irrespective of whether it was revivalist or in the western academic style, was dependant not only on elitist but affluent patronage and he wanted art to regain the easy availability and inexpensiveness it had in the traditional life of the people. He was wholly in favor of making art, meant for the collectivity and not for the affluent few."Chaitanya Krishna, HIPMP, p. 178
\item \textsuperscript{302} Kessar Urm, "Social content in Modern Painting" p 228, Unpublished Phd. Dissertation, Panjab University, 1982
\end{itemize}
hands. In the Last Supper of 1958, Christ almost merges in the bland remoteness of his environment. There is no halo to mark him out and no other sign of divinity. Yet he does stand out, as he seems a lot narrower, sharper, more angular than the 12 apostles in the painting. Jamini Roy himself suggests the reason for his choice of the Last Supper as his theme. "It is sometimes asked why an orthodox Hindu who has never even read the New Testament should be interested in the subject of Christ." Jamini Roy himself gives several reasons. In the first place, he wanted to find out if his new technique could be applied with equal effect to a subject remote from his personal life.... "He wanted to show that the human and the divine could be made one only by abstract, symbolic means......". In these works, one can sense a close parallel between these studies and the anonymous French folk painters of the 12th century whom Gaugain copied. In a change of temper the painting Holy Family is typically folkish and thus there is hardly any emotional value toning manifest. Frank Wesley, a Methodist from Northern India, lives at present, like A.D. Thomas and Angela Trinidad, abroad. He painted the external rather than the historical Christ, to paint Him with Indian feeling. Frank Wesley likes to use symbols. He is a gifted artist, able to use various styles and methods. In this way he conveys an idea more than he reveals himself. He acquired the best of the Lucknow tradition of painting under the guidance of his master Bireswar Sen. But his creativity finds expression through Biblical images drawing upon a variety of artistic styles he has developed over the years. He had a mission as an artist: “My main aim

303 E. Porter, Stanley, Hayes Micheal, Tombs David, Images of Christ, p. 342 Continuum, Intermition Publishing Group, 2004
305 Ibid, p. 28
as an artist was to develop comprehension and awareness of spirituality and experience of God. He executed oil paintings of ‘St. Thomas in India’ ‘Cain and Abel’, and “Mary Washing the Feet of Jesus and many others. In “Mary Washing the Feet of Christ” the presence of Christ is only evident from a foot resting on the delicate hand of Mary. The work appears to be a strange amalgam of suggestiveness and graphicism. Mary has not only typically Indian features, dress and ornaments but is also stylistically derived from the later Bengal School manner.

A number of Christian themes were also painted by, Amrita Sher Gil In her painting Merry Cemetery, we find an echo of Szony’s work: Dressed in black, people scurry towards the stations of the Cross, marked by white, small houses. The dark, forbidding sky is lightened by the colourful crosses in front, some bearing the names of the deceased persons. In the lowest part of the canvas, a bunch of narcissus flowers blooms in white and yellow and a little further there is a red tulip on the grave. The increasingly light tonality in the foreground lifts the painting from its gloom, almost as if resurrecting the dead. “Amrita who had been baptized herself, must have attended several funerals in Zebejeny and absorbed the Catholic

306 Amrita Sher Gil was born in 1913 in Hungary, she studied painting from Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux Arts, Paris and returned to India in 1934 and died in 1941.
idea that life after death is happier, less troublesome. The inscription on the gates of Hungarian cemeteries proclaims, ‘Feltamadunk’!-‘We shall rise again!’ The same concern for the transience of life can be seen in her Hungarian Village Church where the spire of the church rises against the sky. In the foreground there are a number of leafless trees bespeaking the transience of life. Huddles of small figures, men and women are shown on one side of the church. The composition is simple yet elusive, the lines are clear, the figures well annunciated and the colours are laid in broad areas. Despite the clarity and easy readability of the work there is a kind of exclusivity, in the way in which the figures are minimalised and the emotion retained.

In the 1950’s the assimilation of American painters, impressionism and other schools of European modern art resulted in the development of abstract expressionism, emphasizing spiritualization of experience and vision. Artists in Madras who had been inspired by Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury to start on the impressionist adventure, were attracted to this new form of expressionism. The most significant among them was K.C.S Paniker who succeeded Roy Choudhury as principal of the Government School of Arts and Crafts in Madras. By the end of 1940’s Paniker started working on human groups, based on immediate environment as also on Biblical themes. He painted a large number of miracles associated with

307 Dalmia Yashodhara, Amrita Sher Gil a life, p 117, New Delhi, 2006
308 K.C.S Paniker was born in 1911 he was both an influential art teacher as well as an innovative painter heralding, the birth of Modernism in South India.
Christ like “healing the Leper”, “Christ and Lazarus” and so on. In Christ And Lazarus Christ moves forward and with a hand raised in benediction blesses the inert figure of Lazarus as he infuses him with the gift of life. Lazarus is skeletal and the face cadaverous. There is a crowd of figures which witnesses the miracle, with various degrees of reverence, awe and amazement. Paniker restricts the use of colour and suspends the form which acquires an almost translucent monochromic lucidity. His thorough understanding and mastery over the human figure, helped Paniker to articulate various figurative compositions. R.W. Taylor sees in his Christian paintings a pronounced social dimension and a tendency largely towards the events of the passion. Paniker himself provides the raison d'etre of his choice of Christian themes, “If you scratch Christ there is the carpenters son, something authentic.”

In the late 1950’s Christ became quite a favored motif of a large number of artists straddling different artistic styles. The early work of Laxman Pai, a Goanese by birth is marked by a simplicity and elegance, almost folkish in its minimalism. These stylistic characteristics are visible in his Christian paintings as well of this period. The Christian Woman a woman clad in the distinctive garments holding a rosary in her hand is ready to go for her ritual prayer. It has been suggested that many elements including sensuous line the distinctive

310 Ibid p.392
311 Laxman Pai was born in 1926 in Goa educated from Government Diploma Arts in painting Sir J. J School of Arts, Mumbai.
decorative element, the composition as also a flat perspective and the drapery has been inspired by medieval miniatures.

In Good Friday painted in 1950, the devotees also bearing candles are on their way to Church. The work has more or less the same features as the above and is striking because of its stark simplicity. 312

S.L. Prashar’s painting Parvatopdesa of Jesu, shows the monumental figure of Christ against the onrush of Cosmic waters which aims at imparting Peace to the Primeval Sorrow of Life, through a message of Love. 313

Sobha Sihgh is famous for his Sikh paintings has also painted a Jesus with Cross. In this painting the academic style is used. The forms are clear and are perfectly outlined. Even though the size of the cross is much larger than that of the Christ. But the sheer moral force of his penetrating gaze dwarfs it.

Gopal Sanyal’s 314 painting Christ with his Family was painted in 1958. The artist takes the figure of Jesus as symbolic of his philosophy of life that accepts a basic helplessness of man in the face of an antagonistic society 315

The modernistic forms are

312 (ed). Appasamy Jaya Laxman Pai Contemporary Indian Art Series, LKA, 1971
314 Gopal Sanyal was born in 1933 in West Bengal, he prefers drawing with pen and ink on paper. His paintings are few in number but are example of his mastery over colour and colour symbolism.

sharp and an emphasis is laid on planes which appear almost sculpturesque, the subdued contour help in emphasising this illusion.

Jahangir Sabavala\textsuperscript{316} was inspired with the story of the Christ and so a few paintings on His life were executed. In his painting ‘Pieta’ after the descent from the cross of the body of Christ. Christ is shown in the lap of the Virgin and angels are seen in the sky, the upper part of the canvas is covered by the angels. Disciples are standing beside the body. In the painting \textbf{Crucifixion}, painted in 1959 Sabavala has built the composition with a mathematical precision, this effect is heightened with the help of dark lines. The colours are unlike the early cubists sharp and strident and contained within their own receptacles. The facelessness of Christ, Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene lifts the work from a specific spatiotemporal context and gives it universality. His paintings ‘The Nuns’ painted in 1964 and ‘Vespers’ in 1968 as more or less follows the same compositional structure. Hoskote says the works “symbolize the human consciousness wavering on the brink of the unknown” as the protagonists climbs the winding stairs of ruined churches with a lamp and a book.

Sakti Burman’s painting \textbf{The Last Supper} done in 1967 is interesting mainly because of its simplified character yet able to convey the complexity of this significant theme from the Holy Bible. The artist drew a few table napkins to convey the story of

\textsuperscript{316} Jahangir Sabavala was born in 1929 in Mumbai studied in Sir J J School of Art, Heatherly School of Art London.
Jesus at dinner with his disciples. The napkins encompass the figure of the Lord and also that of all his disciples except the one who is to betray him. Two of the napkins also join to form an image of the cross while the third napkin isolates the culprit. The picture is an example of his maturity in developing pictorial metaphor to suit his theme and style.\textsuperscript{317} Another painting \textit{Dreamers on the Ark}, signifies continuation of life after each cycle of extinction of life on earth Sakti adds a meaningful twist by including a youthful couple embracing each other in conjugal bliss. The Ark is full of other sub-human inmates as per the original story, but the dreaming couple dwarfs all other in size and significance.\textsuperscript{318}

Nikhil Biswas\textsuperscript{319} made \textit{Christ among Clowns} in which suffering becomes the prime motif: the suffering of man as experienced by the painter himself, for the conveyance of which both the Christ and the Clown were found adequate. "To me Jesus Christ symbolizes the pain and agony of a suffering man. Hence he is the fittest symbol of the soul stirring pang and helplessness of our age."\textsuperscript{320}

Satish Gujral’s painting \textit{Agony in the Garden} shows the struggling Christ fallen on his back, across the broken pillar of his splendid faith. He with suffering in his eyes, presses convulsively an enormous fist to his teeth. His whole temple totters;

\textsuperscript{317} Ghose Arun, \textit{Sakti Burman, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 2006}
\textsuperscript{318} ibid
\textsuperscript{319} Nikhil Biswas born in 1930 Government College of Arts Kolkata also diploma in sculpture.
and tumbling down the ragged Golgotha lit up by the flames of the conflagration, he, The Saviour, clasps his cross to his heart in the lowest ditch. The bluish whites of his eyes are full of supreme misery. Things which the defeated savior foresaw then—and Golgotha is one of them—appear suddenly in their full grimness. It is a spectacle of a world living on the edge of an abyss: a disguised Hell. The luridness of the flames of the Golgotha take the place of daily light, and his vision—or rather what he sees as ‘the world’ and intends to communicate to us—is also lighted up by this luridness. Crucifixion painted in 1992 is a very evocative painting of the Saviour on the Cross.

In the words of Santo Datta “I am yet to come across such a painting in India or in any other culture, where the Cross appears in an algebraic abstraction verticals of heavy nails with their heads high, and a red streak of horizontal runs across, the half-hidden lowered head of Jesus appears just above a smear of red paint. The eye that is visible, recalls the carved eye of a stone Buddha—the inward looking eyes of the Compassionate One! In such works the dividing line between various religions is blurred even as the artist seeks a consonance between the basic values of each. Crucifixion

shapes. The violent brush work and the unearthly colours imparts an air of superhuman tragedy to the work.

In a small painting of a head of Christ by Akbar Padamsee\(^{323}\), an attempt is made to interpret the quality of the suffering of Christ in the painting the agony that He lived through clearly comes through. Vardarajan in his 1959"Crucifixion" puts the mutilated Christ right in the middle of the mob aiming at a synthesis between the suffering of Christ and the formal elements of the painting.

F N Souza, was one of the founder members of the Progressive Artists Group founded in 1947. Being a Portuegese and Christian he kept on interpreting Christian themes throughout his creative years. He was surrounded by classic Christian iconography but his presentations are so unconventional and sometimes so gory and that the very image becomes frightening in its expressive intensity. There are at least a hundred of such works. Such paintings represent not only the stages of the evolution of his style but also the evolution of the Christian content of his work. Even though he took a large number of Christian themes as his point of reference, but the three episodes that haunted him throughout his life were that of the Last Supper, Crucifixion and Pieta. In these the essentially disturbed personality of the artist manifests itself. His forms become violent, his colours strident, the lines sharp and spiky and the composition often unsteady. That Souza was striving towards a point of comparative ease is also evident from the various Last Supper's that he painted between the 1980’s -1990’s.In

\(^{323}\) Akbar Padamsee was born in 1928 in Mumbai and did graduation in painting from Sir JJSchool of Art.
the Last Supper of 1990’s and of ca. 1999, a different Souza emerges more mellow, more contained with a less hacking of the forms while the intensity remains. The rendition becomes more truly of the traditional narrative of Christ, with the twelve disciples seated along with Christ who is in the centre of the composition. The table against which they sit appears to be inadequate to seat the thirteen people. Christ sits calm and quiet, indicating his future with a gesture of his hand. The colours are strident and dark, the brush strokes broken, capturing a dark moment in man’s history and in one such work painted in 2001 he shows Christ as a sublime being but the disciples faces have been distorted in his characteristic style, faceted and some what almost cubistic. In this painting Christ is in the centre with a halo around his head in light yellow while the background is in an unrelieved dark. He is surrounded by his disciples who are all in robes of different colours and yet are more unified with each other than the ‘Judas’ who is dark and has a face which reveals his guilt in response to which he is also isolated in the manner of a typical iconographic requirement. It is possible that for Souza, the legend of Christ no longer remained only a metaphor for suffering but as one which also held out a hope for redemption. His forms become violent, his colours strident, the lines sharp and spiky and the composition often unsteady. These works however forcefully express the attitudinal changes in the personality of the artist throughout his various periods of stylistic evolution which are reflected in his paintings. These works aptly illustrate his gradual movement away from a violent understanding and approach to the themes to a more gentle reflective one. But he was a rebel who usually painted somewhat unconventional images of Christ. One such painting Untitled painted in 1963, presents him as one who staggers under the weight of his suffering. In this work Christ is chained with an emaciated body and yet has an expression of acceptance. His head is
surrounded by a halo which instead of a disc contains within itself a cross a feature in early images. In the back is a cross in which a miniscule figure of Christ hangs. This feature also suggests as to how for Souza Christianity remained almost medieval in its dimensions. The motif of the instruments of torture like the mace and arrows tied into a bundle is repeated on one side. Even though the figure of Christ is contained yet through the violent cross hatching which articulates the figure a disturbing image is created. In *Untitled* the distorted head of Christ has been resolved into geometrical patterns with an eye that shines forth. The Cross becomes stylized and the horizontal bar take the form of wings. The entire figure is placed against a strident red background which may be a symbolic representation of Passion of Christ. *Last Howl* "an immensely powerful and disturbing image of the crucified Christ, making the last agonized scream from the cross. The head has been depicted as a skeleton, with the teeth of a skull. Souza had said once "I want to do everything: to make others suffer, to make myself suffer. I have no desire to redeem myself or anybody else because man is by his very nature unredeemable, yet he hankers so desperately after redemption. I wanted to hang myself on the cross with both my hands and feel nailed to it..."324 In the *Christ*, the forms become abstract and minimal even as the message and the atmosphere is less violent. Against yellow background stands the cross on which hangs the body of Christ. The cross rises out of a mass of thorny plants and on a strident green mottled background on which stand two figures. On the right a figure exposes the body of Christ while on the other a figure perhaps of

324 Mesquita Theodore, “For Christ’s Sake”, Mumbai Mirror, Wednesday March 22, 2006
St. John stands in a gesture of adoration. Even more than Crucifixion, the theme of Pieta evokes in the artist a mixture of a strange compassion and revulsion. Pieta, from 1963, shows deep anguish in every line. Christ's body is shown as having just been taken down from the Cross by a group of women while in the Pieta, Christ's body is lying on the ground ready for redemption.

The four women are shown in contemporary dresses in gestures of mourning. An entirely different content imbues in, the Resurrection of Christ the work becomes more reflective and in a way abstract. In this work the artist follows more or less the pattern which had been standarised by the artists from the Renaissance onwards. The blessing figure of Jesus Christ levitates upwards and is accompanied by two flying figures hoary and old who possibly substitute the traditional angels and are perhaps two doctors of the church. Three figures in gestures of amazement lie against the rock from which Christ has risen. This work proves beyond doubt that the violence had finally been subdued and reached a point of equipoise.

M F. Husain's paintings were an amalgam of some elements of Western styles and Indian imagery. His brushwork is spontaneous with a forceful expressionistic line that enlivens the simplified apparently accidental but frequently repeated motifs, such as the horse and the landscape. He has a flair for using evocative colour passages that "run" in interrupted spurts throughout the painting. His images are typically Indian, relying on the sensuous grace of traditional Indian sculpture, the vibrancy of folk art and the colours of Indian miniature painting and yet
involved with modernizing forms. That for him the holy symbols of all the religions originated from the same creative impulse becomes clear from his book “Triangles”. In “Triangles” he manipulated the word triangles and uses the number three in many different contexts. For eg. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, Mary, Joseph and Jesus or Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Amongst the Christian paintings that M F Husain executed, the theme of the Last Supper recurs frequently. He uses this event, as in the painting The Last Supper in Blue, not only as a Biblical event in which the requirements of the narrative are fully met but also as a personal interpretation where the emotional toning of the work revolves into his personal angst, as Dalmia puts it “the focus is in the centre, on the very moving image of Christ, with his hand placed on the table in a gesture of holding a vessel. The gesture conveys with a quiet intensity a feeling of holding all things together gently patiently. The dense browns express the last intimacy between Christ and his disciples. In Last Supper in Blue this personal element predominates. The title of the work and a plank of wood around which some people sit “. But there are incursions of modern signifiers of culture as well, while a television beams a nearby robot who is programmed with a giant fork to feed the gathering. On both sides is an Eve in blue and Adam in blue black with the apple in the centre. In a strange mixture of the narratives of the Old Testament and that of the New, Husain however seeks to give the work a timeless dimension. Once again colour like blue, grey and black become the symbols of violence and decay of the contemporary world. The work also, by mixing the two

tales of birth and death lifts the work to another level of understanding. In *Last Supper in Red* the same motif of a wooden plank representing a table is repeated here. It cuts into the figures of the protagonists who are all in silhouette, except for the standing figure, holding a staff in his hand, is perhaps a reference to Christ as a shepherd, tall quiet and inexorable.

**Pieta** is another theme which has involved Husain emotionally. The combination of grief, compassion and a hope for redemption are some strands of this understanding as evident in many works dealing with this theme. Often the artist used the figure of Mother Teresa as that the archetypal mother, Virgin Mary who very often became a symbol of succor for the world.

In one version **Mother Teresa** holds the body of her son in her lap enveloping him with her characteristic sari in white with a blue border. The figure of Christ here symbolizes human suffering at the hands of the people as the mother herself faceless and featureless becomes a symbol of succor. In this painting the composition is much more complex with the mother holding Christ in her arms on her lap, while two other missionaries of charity hold him. One of them makes a gesture of exposition in a truly traditional manner. The group is surrounded by figures, minimal and abstracted, in

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gestures of great wonderment. The forms and the colours are fascinating and used in a typical Husain manner. This breaking up of the form emphasises the note of poignancy in the work.

Another important painter, Krishen Khanna also made a large number of paintings on Christian themes. Basically a figurative painter for whom the human figure has remained the major vehicle for the conveyance of his artistic intent for quite some time now. There has always been an element of satire in his portrayal of humanity. Hands, as an expressive element have always played a major role in his works. And his rendering of Christian themes are no exception. In around the mid sixties Krishen Khanna turned to Christian themes. In his entire oeuvre the number of Christian paintings seems to be very large as he has consistently returned to these. All these works reveal a growing concern with not only the manipulation of form but also an emotional involvement which ranges from the merely sad to a strident social comment. No source of light is visible, but the Christ figure has a luminous presence.\footnote{Sinha Gayatri, \textit{Krishen Khanna: A Critical Biography}, p.135, New Delhi, 2001, 177}

Krishen Khanna also painted a number of versions of the Last Supper. In fact this appears to be amongst the first of the incidents from the life of Christ to engage his attention. \textbf{Betrayal} painted in 1955 a simplistic composition in which Judas embraces and kisses Christ. In his \textbf{Last Supper} painted in 1979, Christ sits on a broad bare table surrounded by his twelve disciples.
In the **Descent of the Christ** painted in 1981 also the hands of the figure play a significant role. The woman in blue right upperhand corner holds her hands above her face while the hands of Christ hang limply. In this work the body of the Christ is carried by two men while a female is standing at the back with her head and face covered with only the sharp and black eyes being visible in an expression of anguish. The colours are contained within clear outlines and the bodies are well defined even though the faces of the figures are diffused. In **Pieta** of 1966 one of the early works an almost headless figure of Christ in an spectral white forms the lower ground of the painting while the rest of the surface is taken over by the figures of the mourners including the figure of Virgin Mary. Fluid brush strokes in red, white and black imparts to the work a dramatic quality.

At the other end of the spectrum of this rendering is the **Pieta** of 1988, where sharpened figures, linear and angular are placed within an almost monochromatic background. The faces of two mourners are somewhat clearly defined while that of Christ is telescoped in the body to such an extend that it becomes more or less invisible. In Krishen Khanna gestures of the hands play a major role in the capturing of the dominant emotion. The hands of the Christ bare the stigmata while the hands of the two mourners, well articulated and improvised in a way become dominant feature of the painting. **Pieta**

"Another subject from the Christ cycle that Khanna returns to is of the Pieta, as Mary holds the exhausted Christ on his descent from the cross. He returns to it over the decades with different stylistic variations. The Pieta paintings relate to his concern with the subject of the dead
and the dying, as much as with the persecuted figure of the Christ. Once again Khanna uses the essential composition of the seated Mother Mary cradling him. Bordering on the narrative, Khanna’s work captures moments in history, much like photographs do, but the artist’s technique is far from photo-realistic. Khanna transfers his observations onto the canvas with spontaneity and exuberance, keeping the representational elements of his subject matter intact. The artist’s use of colour and his expressionist brushwork make the mundane rise to the challenge of the creative.

A. Ramachandran’s early paintings are distinctly expressionistic. His disillusionment with urban life was poignantly reflected in his angst-ridden paintings. The characteristic feature of most of his early works was their size as they were large, akin to murals. They were also powerfully figurative. Ramachandran’s strong and confident lines, and his complete understanding of colours and forms makes his paintings exciting visual drama.330 In his Last Supper 1966 there is no human form, but only the rigid hands clasped in fists and feet peeping out from under the table. Through these anatomical details, he projects the entire gamut of emotions, anger, mourning, frustration and so on. The iconographic requirements are thrown overboard and burning fires that have consumed the bodies are presented as marching towards the hands and feet. In another painting ‘Crucifixion’, the

330 www.contemporaryindianart.com
body of Christ becomes the cross itself.\textsuperscript{331} His witty sense of humor and irony is often reflected in his piquant paintings. In his painting \textbf{Untitled} he uses Christian imagery but in an entirely different manner. In vertical and square bounded panels contain the figures of Apostles, of Christ of annunciation, of the Mother and child, of Mary Magdalene of St. John which are in a typical iconic manner and create a background for the figures in the front but the symbolism becomes multi layered when large part of foreground in front of these iconic representation consists of huge men who are clad in black, are inexorable and almost Apostolic.

In Anjolie Ela Menon’s painting \textit{Eden}, 1972. A curvaceous figure of Eve with an apple in her hand flies through space-suggested by the use of small areas of colour in a dark background and a creeper in movement. Even though the figure is nude, it does not exude any sexuality. Thin, often transparent layers of pigment are laid one upon the other, on a smooth hard surface acquiring a luminous quality. The icon like quality of the face is derived from her studies of medieval Byzantine icons \textit{Mother Teresa caring for Christ}, 1998., we see Mother Teresa holding Christ body in her lap, the body is in brown colour and is more like a skeleton figure showing his pain. The painting is

\textsuperscript{331} This explanation was given to Dr. Urmie Kessar by the artist himself when she met him at Kasauli in June, 1977.
... uniting two universal figures of compassion with a distinctly India flavor. Mother Teresa in the painting is shown taking the place of the Virgin who holds the emaciated body of the Christ.\textsuperscript{332}

Badri Narayan, the course of his career has painted paintings on different themes. Badri Narayan who is a self-taught painter, has a yen for lyrical mythological subjects and has painted many Christian themes. In \textbf{Nativity} a group of three figures the mother Mary in the centre and two angels on each side holds the little plank on which lies the infant Jesus. A huge eye shines on them from the top. Modulations of huge swathes of colour swam over this group and yet it dominates over the entire composition. The figures are in the typical Badri Narayan manner, small, with heightened eyes, which occasionally come out from the face and clearly defined limbs. Once again an Indian reference is imparted by the use of an ochre robe the baby wears.

In the Bird of Eternal Life, Christ becomes a vision of the risen Messiah. He is wearing an orange robe with yogic beads and dreadlocks locating the work in an Indian context. He is holding a bird which is a recurring motif in his works, which symbolizes the flight of the spirit.\textsuperscript{333}

Sunil Das painted a Portrait of \textbf{Nun} in 1987 which shows a heavy faced woman, with dark glasses and full lips, clad in the habits of a nun. She inhabits a space in which delicate but clear lines behind her perhaps invoke a city scape. She stands against a faint cross with which her

\textsuperscript{332} www.indianartcircle.com
\textsuperscript{333} www.badrinarayan.com
body becomes one. Two stumps of tree enframe the uppermost register on both sides. The dominant colour tonality is in various shades of blue and grey, with an occasional slash of red which imparts to the work a symbolic intent.

Arup Das has painted a number of paintings on Christianity, for him Christ is a symbol of tortured humanity. The present work Life of Christ painted in 1969 is a narrative of his life. His ministry is symbolized by the goat, the anger of the ruling powers against him by a flaming colour in the middle, the burning sun and the final punishment represented by a masked assassin like figures and a soldier on a horse back. There are some motifs which cannot be satisfactorily explained like a trident and an enclave of semi clad/nude dancing figures in the top right hand corner.

His Christ painted in 1969, however is more explicit. The work shows Christ being hung on the cross. At the bottom of the cross are the mourning figures of St. John and Virgin Mary. A Roman soldier on a Horse/camel supervises the work while a swarthy complexioned worker secure the cross with planks of wood, and hammer driving in the nails in his hands. Typically the compositions are full of forms and movement.

A.R.H. Bul Imam, made the painting of Descent from the Cross, 1983, The scene represents one of the most popular themes in
Christian art. The body of Christ is being taken down from the cross while Virgin Mary stands lamenting at its foot. The colours are sharp and the way they are faceted as for instance in the gown of Mary Magdalene, make the painting look surrealistic. This is enhanced by the arbitrary shifting of the sizes of the figures. The work appears to be inspired by Italian mannerist painters of the late 16th Century. An inscription on the painting gives it a date of 1983.

P.V. Janakiram specialized in wash and tempera techniques and later in sculpture and reliefs. Christian themes are recurring in his works. The most often portrayed theme is the cross, followed by the theme of the 'Virgin and the Child'. The process of indigenizing the content appears to have reemerged during the contemporary period but in different ways. Jyoti Sahi takes the motif of Shiva and paints him as the crucified 'Jesus', for he feels that both Siva and Christ are the Gods of creation as also of redemption. In the painting he shows Crucified Christ engaged in the cosmic dance. According to him Jesus is also Neelkanta (the name of Shiva as Blue-throated one) who took the sins of the world on himself to redeem the world, just as Shiva swallowed poison to save the world. Jyoti Sahi claims that he must be accepted not only as an artist, but also as an Indian theologian. The content of his pictures arise out of the Hindu and Buddhist world of images and those of the Indian tribal's, interpreted in terms of Christian symbology and theology. His style and techniques of paintings are not Indian, trained though he was under Sudhir Khastgir. He acknowledges the influence of German Expressionism (Emile Nolde, Bar) but he also owes much to the Indian influence for the content of his work. He takes the stories, persons, animals, Gods and symbols and juxtaposes them with other Christian symbols. 334

334 Ibid p 509
The works of E. Alkazi, a person deeply associated with the new wave of theatrical arts in India and an avid collector of seminal art works, fall somewhere in the indeterminate space between a painting and a drawing. Alkazi calls all the mentioned works as *Painting* done in 1968. In the first painting the format of the work is a narrow vertical. The entire space is filled with a standing figure, whose arms and legs are bound by coils of thin ropes. A vaguely defined head with its features resembling the tortured head of Christ, painted by the northern European painters, rises above the rigid column of his body. In the second painting the format is that of a cross and the column figure of crucified Christ. In the horizontal arm of the cross, behind the head and the arms landscape of closely packed houses can be seen. Often the lines merge with the mass of colour while sometimes, as in the crossed legs they acquire an identity of their own. The graining texture of the tissue paper enhances the expressionistic quality of the work. In the third work also titled *Painting*, Christ becomes redeemer. His head is haloed the eyes look outwards even as the body is still bound by innumerable ropes.

A number of ordained priests and nuns also inevitably painted Christian themes. Once again a serious process of indigenization of the content is visible in their works. Chief among them being, Sister Genevieve, a French nun is considered the only foreigner some art critics take seriously as an Indian artist. She has read a good deal of
classical works on Indian art and visited a few great temples of Karnataka. 'The Divine Babe', either is Madonna often with other women, or in some kind of nativity scenes is a very favourite theme of this artist. She has illustrated a film strip on the life of Christ. In it St. Joseph and the grown up Jesus all look like Sikhs. Later she revolted against using Hindu symbols, because she gradually came to think that Christian themes thus painted would be confused with Hindu themes and would then give way to misunderstanding.335

Sister Claire was trained in painting in Delhi for seven or eight years and considers Sr. Genevieve her guru although she keeps her independent identity. Most of her paintings are of nativity etc. with women devotees, and worship in Indian settings. She has tried in a limited way with mudras and thus got into Indian symbolism. A number of Last Supper paintings she has executed in an Andhra village setting are very impressive. This context seems to be her favorite locale.336 For her the Indian physical context remains a consistent symbol to express the universality and relevance of the message of Christ.

S H Raza’s work Church was painted in 1957. Two Churches are placed against a red foreground, One of the Churches is a bit tilted. A number of colours, in little smudges are used. The Churches are pushed forward by the dark background. The simplicity of the composition and the use of colours, which are unreal, presage the later stylistic development of the artist.

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336 Ibid p.508
Avinash Chandra’s, Churches with pointed spires jostle with one another for space in the confined area in which they are placed. The sun that shines above is itself composed of open ended circular lines and is flanked by two clear and one vaguely defined circular feature. The colours used are brown, black, yellow and variations on blue.

M. Reddeppa Naidu337 a member of the Group 1890338 painted series of pictures with the recurring theme of churches and cathedrals from 1961 to 1963. The churches and cathedrals inspire him because of their clarity of line and pattern and architectural harmony. The pictures have free flowing lines, interlinked with swathes of translucent colors.339 Church Spire in this spires jostle with one another for space in the confined area in which they placed, The sun that shines above is itself composed of open ended circular lines and is flanked by two clear and one vaguely define circular. The colors used are brown, black, yellow and tonal gradations of blue.

Raghunandan Sharma painted Series no.1 and 2. In the first, a tall church which rises against dark light dappled mountains. At the base of the structure is a crowd of minimally indicated figures, a rider on a horse, a promenading couple and stray figures viewed from the back. Colours like deep blue, pale yellow red and black are

337 M. Reddeppa Naidu born in 1932 and did his Diploma in painting Government College of Arts and Crafts, Chennai.

338 Group 1890 was formed on 19th July 1963, the name derived from the number of the house of J. Pandya where the artist met. Its members were Jeram Patel, J. Swaminathan, Amba Das, Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, Himmat Shah, Eric Brown, Jyoti Bhatt, Rajesh Mehra, M. Reddeppa Naidu, Raghav Kaneria, Balkrishna Patel and S.G. Nigam.

organized in repeated accents. The Church with its well defined façade contrasts with the fluidity of the human forms. In another work again the finial of a church pierces the high sky. The few figures are just daubs of colours and in a way become integrated with the landscape. The alternating areas of colour add poignancy to the landscape.

Shuva Prasana, Cathedral 1985, This work, of an unstable cathedral complete with the spire holding a clock, and glass panelled doorway is placed against a stark background broken only by a flashing spark of blue lightening. The buff cathedral, sharply drawn with the precision of an etching, totters against the dark sky. The clock in the centre of the belfry has petals of flowers for its hands and the firmly shut doors with multicoloured glass panels imbues the simple cathedral with layers of meaning. His colours always build on variations of tonal intensity and are in total consonance with the theme.\(^{340}\)

A significant and almost an abrupt change both in the interpretation of Christian content as also in the experimentation with styles can be sensed as the medieval Christian painting devolved into its modern phase. During the late 16\(^{th}\) and early 17\(^{th}\) c the artist had essentially focused on copyng the style and manner of the contemporary European Christian art. The 19\(^{th}\) c characterized by the concept of the “picturesque” inevitably concentrated on the capturing of the “quaint” and the unusual resulting in works which pictorialised ancient monuments including Christianity. It is interesting to see that perhaps because the faith of the ruling classes was primarily Christian

who had been used to magnificent works of Christian art they did not
capture the existing Christian monuments only a very few of which had
in any case been made by this time and were essentially concentrated
in Christian pockets like Goa etc. It is during the early 20th c that first
clear intimations of change become evident when artists like Nand Lal
Bose initiated the process of an interpretation of the motif of Christ and
the cross as signifiers of a new world view: a world view which was not
content simply with making a kind of reportage of the events and
legends but makes an effort to understand them in depth, revealing
their multilayered meaning in a new context. Within this broad motif
however two processes worked together sometimes parallel with each
other, at others confronting one another but more often establishing a
kind of synthesis. On the one hand one was what might be called the
indigenization of the Christian content and the other revolved around an
effort to find a new, more contemporary stylistic vocabulary to interpret
it. It is interesting to see as to how, while staying within these broad
parameters. successive generations of artists of the pre 1960 and post
1960 periods were able to impart an entirely different content to the
same themes. For the early artists, essentially, the indigenization of
content remained the prime concern like the simple use of Indian
drapery and utensils with the artists going so far as to paint Christ in
the image of Shiva, Buddha, Sikh Gurus and so on. The artists of the
post 60's period interpreted these symbols like the Agony, the Betrayal,
the Last Supper, the Crucifixion not only as universal and thus non-
individual symbols of suffering and betrayal but also as an expression of
their personal angst, of their own sense of torture and alienation from
the conformist world as apparent particularly in F.N.Souza, Krishen
Khanna and so on. A further dimension was given to this 'personal'
interpretation by M.F.Husain who gave these themes a more
contemporary visage rooted in the urbanalia and thus more easily
accessible to the modern Indian mind. His approach to Christian themes was so deeply rooted in contemporary India that he often mutated the Christian legendary figures into specifically Indian ones who for him stood for the time honoured values of humanism and compassion that goes beyond mere piety. His series on Mother Teresa is an unequivocal expression of this approach.