Chapter 6

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A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF M.F. HUSAIN'S ART AND THOUGHT

Indian Art remained a collective expression of the social experience of the people. India has manifested a peculiar genius to assimilate and absorb foreign elements so well as it leave hardly any trace of the original influence. The pronounced trait in the Indian character exerted a profound influence in shaping the social order, cultures, traditions, epics and religious themes. The process of absorption and giving a 'new look' to the older features was a long one extending from the Vedic age far down into the medieval period of the Indian history.

This chapter will deal with the M.F. Husain's selected Mythical & Legendary paintings. Husain's art originates from his tactile contact with life and brings to it an interpretive insight recognizing the moment when the subject reveals its truth. The symbols are generally borrowed from traditional pictorial conventions and mythology: a bird in cage, a cactus, a spider, an outspread palm. Husain's sensibility comes through, as expressionistic but is very different from the
European expressionistic with whom the term is associated. It is a muted expressionism except some early paintings are emotional outburst. Figures are always touched by a prideful aloofness, a some of irony even detachment. In general, characters in painting possesses a dialectical life and these characters establish a relationship with the outside world from which they are drawn and upon which they comment driving their humanness.

In the years after independence, the Indian painting was just vitalizing itself after the decline of the Bengal School but as well as recognizing the intervention contribution of Amrita Sher-Gill, Rabindar Nath Tagor, Jamini Roy, George - Keyt, after these big names, the contemporary painters are F.N. Souza, S.H. Raza, K.H. Ara, H.A. Gade, M.F. Husain, Gagender Nath. Ramkinkar, Nandlal Bose, Tyeb Mehta, Akbar Padamsi, S.Gujral R.S. Bisht, K.S. Kulkarni and A. Ramachandram. Among these artists, M.F. Husain is a genius. He does not seem to belong to any local or social context any more and seldom participates in the organized activities of society having given himself over to a nomadic existence he touches upon the unexpected and idiosyncratic turn in human lines. It proves that he has learnt to maintain a balance between the world and himself. Genius artist allows to
hold together precariously, desperate contacts, influence, inspiration without becoming entirely enmeshed in them. He did so.

In beginnings years, he was deeply entrenched in poverty, because he had to maintain six children out of his little source of income. In this situation, he began to work in a toy factory. He used to design toys, cut them in fret wood and paint them. He spent many years in this profession.

M.F. Husain is an expressionistic and impressionistic artist of independent thinking. whatever may be the shape and drawing in the paintings but expression of ideas is good, the artist has succeeded in depicting the same atmosphere that he has desired. He is not a traditional artist. He supports whatever latest progress the art has made and take delight in doing experiment in the styles based on latest researches. Husain's creativity has flown in to thousand directions as films, murals sculptures, designing, and social, epics, traditional, religious, legendary. He has left his stamp on such structures as modern paintings different style and technique, and trends to contemporary paintings.

"My paintings drawings and the recent paper work has been directly influenced by my experiences of traditional Indian dolls, paper toys, shapes galore. The experience of being with
them and the inspiration to create them are inseparable. A painter is a child in his purity of feeling, for only then he creates with authenticity of his being.”

The early influences which build the spirit of Husain, his traditional background the family. Being a Muslim monolithic is a part of faith, that demanding to the individual. He is also a urdu poet. who accepts mediocrity on a virtue which draws to an inner life. Since, he has a sensitive soul which has the respects for other but it is not likely to revolt against the convention of particular socio-economic set-up. So, he must have learnt to maintain this creative tension between social involvement and individual freedom.

Husain spent his free time reading the romantic urdu poetry novel and formed a relief from the bondage in a regular way of life. Husain recited an urdu copulate he had composed:

“What’s the world coming to?
The pot has upturned
And the coin is false”

the socio-cultural situation of the late 1940’s had the possible effects on the attitude of the M.F. Husain. Progressive painters of Bombay (Later also Delhi) were involved in pushing Indian
art into free expressiveness so that it might move on its own momentum towards a modern Indian Medium.

Husain joined this progressive group of painters but approach in this context was fundamental to Indian art. The earliest painting between the period of 1948 - 52, are important because that shows the values of Indian art. These approach pushed him to hold a significant place in Husain's own development In the early paintings, he depicts his immediate environment. But later on these theme became more sophisticated work of art.

Husain's painting started getting noticed in 1947 his first painting to be exhibited was 'Sunhera sansaar', at the annual exhibition of the Bombay Art society. Husain says "Ram Chatterjee wrote the first review of my work on this occasion. In that he praised my 'bold and judicious colours'".

As a young man he had taken a great delight in the myriad shapes and colour pattern of country made toys. "Husain's paintings of the post Delhi period are reminiscent of the toys which were his childhood companions, but created on a different - level of consciousness."

Husain is a introvert and formulates abstract conceptions with little correspondence to objective realities on symbolic themes as traditional mythical, social, religious and epic, used
symbolic colours expressive of his own romantic sensations, juxtaposed to attain strikingly evocative effects. Shiv Kapur says “Husain’s art is the product of a society in a state of acute flux.” Through this his role as a prophet is established.

Husain’s paintings show a keen sense of design with the domination of colour. He has inherited this quality from his early pre-occupation as calligrapher. Initially he devoted himself to calligraphy. Calligraphy is the grammar and essence of design. Behzad was the founder of Mughal school in India for calligraphy and set the standard for powerful drawing and accurate draftsmanship. Husain’s vigorous strokes in his early work are a positive indication of his strength in drawing and mastery of line designer specially balancing the two horizontal, is achieved by the architectonic arrangement of space and composition, have a deeply interwoven relationship. The wide areas suggesting volumetric combination, lines pregnant with unspeakable violence, the salient features of his art.

Husain expresses a very revealing principle, written under the title ‘Presence Hadrat’ He says,’ calligraphic skills not only in the mastery of the individual forms but also in their relationship to the surrounding space; the balance and rhythm of form and non-form calligraphy when it adopts the forms of the arabesque, deals with time and the infinite rhythms created
by the encountered of objects with space within defined borders.”

Husain displays his water colours paintings at Pandara art gallery. Bombay. Sufism is also the dominant theme of his painting, which is done through thrilling colours. calligraphy helped Husain to make use of it. Husain says “Calligraphy skill lies not only in the mastery of the individual forms but also their relationship to the surrounding space. The balance and the rhythm of form and non form calligraphy also encompasses the full expressive range of geometrical form.” Speaking on Sufism Husain’s says” Darkness and light are its archetypal symbols because the art natural, immediate self expression of a root experience of the divinity. some Sufi groups consider numbers the principle of being and the root of all sciences. they express them as the first effusion of spirit or intellect upon the soul.

Husain has painted so many series on the mythical like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Durga, Parvati, Kali, Lakshmi, Sarswati, Duldul and Hanuman etc. Hanuman is originally a monkey and so that his moments are those of cavorting mischievous animal. Husain is also fascinated by Ganapati, again, this elephant headed god take on many form. We are familiar with these forms through an ancient Indian art
specially sculpture. The dancing Ganapati is not common, but it carries an unknown sense of drama. Husain has used his strokes to create just this image. In describing the Husain’s work, Gita Kapur says “That the painted holding the brushes in his mouth, and with the paint lines dangling from his toes, description appears exaggerated, because Husain was not the only one at work.” Each painter had a stool on which the paint cans were placed. In fact, it is hard to believe that he freely painted film scenes directly on the cloth without using the technique of squares.

He is the earliest painter to perfect the technique of oil painting and to make it popular at the national and international level. “His medium is mainly oil, but he also makes pen and ink sketches.”

The theoretical compositions and subjects of the ancient India regarding mythical and legendary were to get acquired a fresh blood, and reality.

The modernist painter did not suffer from the anxiety of influence, to choose his roots from among cultures and traditions that were considered alien. What was borrowed was modified, without any definite break with tradition, modernism in Indian produced its own tradition. And this tradition has as many made by individuals who had in their work an
unmistakable sense of Indian present by Husain is the most authentic Indian variety of modernism in the trend of paintings that time.

The next phase beginning from about 1953, often referred to as Husain's 'folk' period, was the result of a rather self-conscious search for a style. At a time when indianness was a recurring issue, Husain partly yielding to such indirect pressure and partly in continuation of his own involvement with the Indian environment, took up a variety of themes based upon village motives. The water colours, wooden toys and murals of this time had verve and charm, but they lacked a deeper aesthetic significance which Husain had already expressed in his earlier work. This was an early indication that precedence to pictorial considerations, without a corresponding personal involvement with the content tended to leave him with a mannered and decorative residence. During to this period, M.F. Husain painted like 'Marathi women' 'Balaram Street' and 'Women at work', had strongly sturdy peasant figures transmuted into a magical space which was mythical and real at the same time. The inspiration for many of these forms came from the street life his neighborhood in Bombay inhabited as it was by prostitutes, touts and others.

Far out of the mainstream of the Indian tradition, Husain
is one of the few Indian painters who has struck out on a new path. He has discarded all hoary stereotypes and tried to express himself in modern symbols. An since the modern preoccupation is to simplify, we find his work lacking in redundancies which often clutter a work of art with prettiness and cleverness.

"Subdued colours, wide areas suggesting spatial and volumetric combinations, lines pregnant with unspeakable violence - these are in short the salient characteristics of Husain's art."

After completing his art studies in Bombay, Husain spent some years painting portraits in the academic manner. There followed a trip to Delhi, where he discovered for the first time the precise and exquisite forms of the Mathura sculpture. This was a new world opening before his eyes.

He carefully studied the works of the ancient artists of India and decided to combine tradition with his own native bent. Legendary symbolic themes. As a young man he had taken a great delight in the myriad shapes and colour patterns of country made toys. And later, as a designer in a furnishing establishment in Bombay, he acquired that keen sensibility which can only develop in a milieu of hard plastic angularities. Time passed and Husain, now a professional artist,
tried to revive the static existence of man and things. His paintings are glimpses of reality charged with a ponderous sense of existence.

Once a sign board painter, he is completely self-taught and as such he is not cramped by academic formalism and theories of painting. In this works the element of traditional expressionism are the most eloquent. Husain is a great draughtsman, a subtle colourist, a conscientious experimenters and a purist in technique. His influence on the younger generation is understanding the subject to them.

The Mecca series are also called Sufi paintings, Husain writes about this: "God established all names and then effaces them in presence' so a tradition relates. Divine presence are states or stations in which the absolute reveals itself to the mystic in once of the forms of the Divine Names." God is present in this name at the same moment as he absent' this doctrine of immanence and transcendence in never to be forgotten by the Sufi.

In the context of Mother Teresa. Husain writes "No idea how my mother Zainab looked like. She must be a Maharashtrian beauty from Pandharpur, clad in a vineyard sari, a goldplated ring dangling under her nose lip like linking temple bells of vithoba. I may have been a year and half.
when my mother bid farewell to this planet. She refused to get herself photographed.\textsuperscript{14}

Husain sketched those people who were monumental to their struggle for a daily existence. The most memorable early works is between the spider and lamp painted in 1956, where the heavy limped present woman who are at the same time statuesque stand literally marking space between the lamp and mythical spider. The bold experiment strokes with which the figures are painted is matched by the calligraphic quality of the miniatures on top of the paintings.

Husain was influenced by the grandeur and classicism of Indian art at this juncture was to state, ‘one reason why I went back to the Gupta period of sculpture was to study the human form, when the British ruled we were taught to draw a figure with the proportions from Greek and Roman sculpture, that was what I thought was wrong in the east the human form is an entirely different structure the way a woman walks in the village that are three breaks from the feet, the hips and shoulder they more in rhythm the walk of a European, is erect an archair.’\textsuperscript{15}

There is a great proliferation in Husain’s art both in themes and handling since around 1956. There are his Ragmala, Naritya, Series, Horses, priests, women, Ramayan
Mahabharata and theme are self-portraits. Ostensibly, the theme of the Husain are not problematic but when Husain painted theme for pictorial reasons, it does become a problem. But most of the painters under these headings, are not clear in their meaning. Even Husain fails to understand the innermost meaning of the subject.

A number of myths which link the past with the present animal symbolic significance for simple village folk. They listen to the series of the Ramayan, Mahabharata and others old stories with devotion and faith. They identify with Hanuman who is supposed to have lifted an entire mountain to rescue Lakshmana and with the Mahabharata warrior Arjun. In the Ramlila performances, in their scriptures books and even on the walls of their homes and temples these very same symbols are seen. This was the award around Husain, and he was able to capture its drama in his series. Husain exhibited his Mahabharata series at in 1971. Later on the series was exhibited in Bombay at the pundole Art Gallery. Husain who was raised and enriched with ancient tradition, drove unique dynamic from the ethnic narrative tradition.

The only regret is that he was interpolated pseudo symbols. They demand to be understood extrapictorially yet, if one concedes, the hand despairing after a shoe or the lantern
forgotten in the desert, only provide bonal messages.

In manipulating the element and imitating the subject, he is cheating himself out of his own genius. He has developed moreover a virtuosity that itself because under repetition methodical painter lines. Thus, it can be said conclusively that Husain’s comment - suggest a sharp intelligence and deep study of affairs around him.

I must finally say that Husain’s art is the art of power. Like Everest, it is there. It exists for its own sake, whether one likes it or not.
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