CHAPTER – 2

CASE STUDY-
AN INDIAN INSTALLATION
- HEMA UPADHYAY
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CASE STUDY: AN INDIAN INSTALLATION ARTIST - HEMA UPADHYAY

Life History

This chapter describes and presents India’s prominent contemporary installation artist Hema Upadhyay’s life history, her childhood and how and when she entered the world of art? Where did she live in her childhood? Where did she complete her education? When did she enter the creative world of art and when she created her first artwork? Etc.

But before describing her life history, we have to know about her personality. Because when we know about her personality only then we will be able to know and understand about her life and her work in a better manner.

Now, when we talk about her personality, some questions naturally arise like – What is personality? How does it work to know about someone’s life and her/his thoughts? So first we will solve these questions.

Personality

For understanding personality, we study some famous definition of famous psychologists.

‘Personality’ is a word that comes from Latin ‘Personare’. And its meaning is – Mask. And this Latin word also comes from Greek word ‘Prosopon’. And its
meaning is behavior or image or expression of face. So we can say that the behavior and expression and the reaction of human are called personality.¹

Another definition is - “A set of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive tendencies that people display over time and across situations and that distinguish individuals from each other”²

Yet another definition to Understand the personality is - “Personality characteristics, emotional responses, thoughts, and behaviors that are relatively stable over time and across circumstances”.³

Personality in Freud’s view – “Human personality – including its emotions and strivings – arises from a conflict between our aggressive, pleasure seeking biological impulses and internalized social restraints against them”.⁴

If we say it in easy words, personality is a set of our behavior, emotions, and thoughts and behind this there are lots of things playing a major role in the inner self. And they make differences in each and every single person. That reaction is special to everyone.

After understanding the personality, now we talk about Hema Upadhyay (See Plate No. 2.1), she is an adorable personality of Gujarat, (See Map No. 2.1) Hema Hirani (After marriage Hema Upadhyay) was born in Baroda (See Map No. 2.2) in 1972, to a family who left Karachi during partition and settled in Baroda in 1947. She was grown up in a family, who was creative and constructive with great love and affection, and her family was also sturdy and struggling.
Plate No. – 2.1

Map No. – 2.1
Personality develops in each and every human being in a different style. This is compiled of knowledge and different kinds of thoughts. And Hema’s personality is adorable and fascinating. She was a combination of creativity, inventiveness eyes, emotion, aggressive, memories and of course hard working too.

Her grandfather Kishoomal Hirani was a great person and he was that first person, who introduced art to Hema Upadhyay in her early age. Her father, Manohar Hirani did civil construction work and he lost one of his legs in his early age. And her
mother Beena Hirani, who has a great personality, did embroidery (especially – Croshiya) work. Hema had also done an exhibition with the collaboration of her mother. Her mother and her brother Manish Hirani still live in Baroda.5

As we talk about personality, lots of things play a major role in our life and in making up our personality. Hema faced various situations and conditions in her early days and her early life. Like her family’s migration from Karachi at the time of partition, her father’s mishap, her own migration from Baroda after completing her education and many other situations which she handled in her life, all these things and thoughts are reflected in her work. All these incidents and accidents are played a major role in her art journey. They all were saved in her conscious and unconscious mind.

In Freud’s view, - “Only part of the mind is available for inspection and provides normal awareness (conscious); some of it is occasionally conscious (preconscious), and some are hidden, not available for observation (unconscious). Repressed thoughts, feelings, and wishes are hidden from awareness.6 (See Chart No. 2.1)
Tall and beautiful, with a sensitive and vivacious face, Hema came from a very progressive and creative family of Baroda. Her family migrated from Pakistan. She was extremely attracted towards visual arts from her childhood. All of these memories remained alive in her preconscious mind. They are all reflected in her artwork.

In Hema’s words- “My introduction to art (besides drawing and painting at home), was also through my grandfather, Kishoomal Hirani. He would make our holidays constructive and creative (visiting the zoo, play in the gardens, Kamati Baugh, art competitions and other such places of entertainment). One such holiday, he took us to the Faculty of Fine Arts Fair. I did not know where we were, but I remember entering a room with a lot of people dressed as animals… a masquerade of sorts, I remember a Giraffe head that came so close to my face … I jumped away.

With time, my creative ventures adorned my bedroom walls. This was followed by a time when I wanted to become an air hostess. But painting continued”.

She was attracted to the artistic world since her young age. She got involved in art more to pass time. She enjoyed art from her childhood and showed her interest in fine art. It cannot even be said that she had been influenced by the contemporary generation of young artists or that the upheavals, political and artistic, of her times, have had a very determining influence on her and her art.

**Academic Career**

She completed her earlier education from a convent school of Baroda, and after completing her school education she did her B.F.A. and M.F.A. also from Baroda. If we think and ask about her starting days, we are surely shocked after
knowing her views. In Hema’s words- “I joined the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, in 1991, in the wish of doing applied arts (only for the craze of advertising and the fascination that goes with it). But that was not to be as I was admitted into painting and, with a lot of influence from my parents, I started classes. With one situation: that I would re-apply for applied arts the following year. But, I never did re-apply”. After knowing her views I thought that if she had really joined applied arts then maybe we would never have got a bold and fascinating Indian artist of installation art.

The identification of Hema Upadhyay both as a woman and as an artist developed especially in her college days when she was admitted in B.F.A. in 1991, when she just began to explore the world of color and canvas. And after this, she started looking at things with creative eyes. After joining the B.F.A. course she never looked back again. In Hema’s view- “On the personal and professional level, I consider the years 1993 onward absolutely path changing for me as an individual. During the third and fourth year at college, my work changed a lot. New elements began to appear in my work and these were very personal”.

B.F.A. - 1995 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda.

M.F.A. - 1997 Masters Degree in Printmaking, Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharajah Sayaji Rao University, Baroda. (See Plate No. 2.2)

Hema Upadhyay improved her skill in painting and print-making at the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Baroda, experimenting with various materials
and languages, often personal in nature, from art school itself. With the help and efforts of her skill, Hema Upadhyay developed a new form of her art.

Hema has a dynamic and affectionate personality; she, along with her work has always played an important role in the world of art. During the four-year course of study, she was introduced to a lot of different materials for which, till then, she could see no creative purpose/value. And a lot of work followed. It was only in her third year of study that she became aware of her continuous use of these materials, and the narrative in her work. The exposure to different materials, languages, people, teachers and theories made her more aware of her own work and the purpose of it.

Incidents of her private life affected her mind and her work in many ways, these all incidents and accidents are converted in rudiments, which recur frequently in her work. Many of these stories became the sources of her artwork. In her early days of artwork, she was not decided that she would use human figure in her future artwork. That’s why she always considered her study classes as a burden. She went through them without much curiosity. She avoided figurative work, working around people, not putting them in as complete figures, but painting in elements that would be a symbol of their existence: Like her father’s artificial leg, a chair as a symbol of her father’s comfort and power, toys as symbols of hand puppets. Over a period of time the figure did become visible in her works, not painted, but as a black and white xerox of itself. Step by step she started using photographs of herself--by now she was certain enough to speak of the self and deal with figuration. But this was only a little after she shifted to Bombay in 1998.
Soon after the completion of her art education (1991-1997), Hema Upadhyay made a conscious decision to shift to Bombay (1998) and her encounters with this metropolitan city and how the metropolitan identity is created became her concerns over the years.

**Longitudinal Achievements**

Hema has achieved a very important place in Indian art world. She was just superb in creating her imagination in virtual to real form. She has explored displacement related issues with an autobiographical approach.

2001 – 'The Nymph and the Adult', (See Plate No. 2.3) a mixed uneven was shown at the Indian triennial, 2001, New Delhi, India. Hema Upadhyay was the recipient of a National Scholarship from the Ministry of Human Resources, and also has to her credit annual awards from the Gujarat Lalit Kala Academy and the national Lalit Kala Academy for her work in the 10th International Triennale - India hosted in New Delhi. The 2000 handmade cockroaches symbolized much more than just the fright they create; they go further than and verbalize in a context of the nuclear war. Cockroaches have been known to endure nuclear reactors, indicating that they might be the only survivors some day.⁹

In her achievements, we also include some residencies and special workshops and some of the museum exhibitions-

**Invited as Artist in Residence**

In 2001, Hema Upadhyay has a part of Art Space, Sydney Australia residence. After this, she attended Vasl International Artists Residency, Karachi, Pakistan in
2003. Then she was invited to the residence of Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, USA in 2007. In 2008, she was invited to Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore for creating her unique work. And in 2010, she attended the residence of Atelier Calder, Sache, France. Because of her unique style, she has acquired a unique place in our heart and she has also acquired a renowned place on the national and international platform of art.

**Museum Exhibitions**

She extended her verbal communication of art to include installations; from 2004 onwards her installations have been a part of an assortment of group shows at the museums in: the Seam, Jerusalem, Israel; Macro museum, Rome, Italy; Ivam, Valencia, Spain; Mart museum, Italy; Mori art museum, Tokyo, Japan; Hanger Bicocca, Milan, Italy; Chicago Cultural Centre, Chicago, USA; Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France; Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan; Japan Foundation, Tokyo and the Henie Onstad Kunssenter, Oslo, Norway.

From India, she was the only artist, who participated in the introductory exhibition for the reopening of the Macro Museum, Rome. The show was arranged by Luca Massimi Barbero, Hema Upadhyay presented her installation work, which is 'Where the Bees Suck, There Suck I'.

**Residencies and Workshops**

Hema Upadhyay was an amazing personality of India, she has made us proud. She was also part of several residencies where she presented displacement related issues with an autobiographical approach. In 2003 she participated in the Vasl
residency in Karachi where she made a work titled ‘Loco-Foco-Motto’ (See Plate No-2.5) (which she later in 2007 exhibited in a group show at the Hanger Bicocca, Milan, Italy) that spoke about the India-Pakistan divide keeping in mind her own family history related to the partition of India. The works are also a break from her marquee representation; they are more dexterity-oriented as she has used matchsticks and glue to create chandeliers.11

In her future works, Hema Upadhyay introduced an additional layer to the works as sculptural elements. The artist constantly utilizes patterned surfaces, which quote from Indian spiritual iconography and traditional textile design. Hema Upadhyay’s marriage of these surfaces with her own image is meant to touch on themes of migration and displacement in South Asia and also reflects upon the existential plight of the artist as sole creator, for even in her many incarnations she remains the sole inhabitant of her artistic worlds, of Mumbai’s shanty towns (slums) at the base of the sculpture (or, inverted, as a canopy to the paintings). The upturned slums reference the repercussions and socio-economic inequalities that emerge as a hidden consequence of the relentless tide of urban development in the city. Her use of shading and her depiction of smoke-like elements give the impression of claws of destruction; a theme elucidated by the title, ‘Killing Site’12 (See Plate No. 2.6)

‘Dream a Wish, Wish a Dream’ (2006) (See Plate No. 2.7), was the first large-scale installation that Hema did; it is also one of her most famous works. At first glance, her installations seem to be a landscape of Bombay; however, it is statements on a city of migrants who make Bombay, who have had generations inherit the living places. There the work deals with the socio-political position of Bombay as an
economic capital of the country. This work also speaks about ‘space’ in its physical sense, where people go for familiarity and comfort in order to have a place of stay in unfamiliar surroundings. Its people, objects, vegetation, houses, drainage, and lanes. One comes face to face with these visuals/objects in work that tease the viewer out of his/her own comfortable space.13

Hema has constantly experimented and researched with materials, ideas, and spaces. Her works have an instinctual quality, which is achieved because of her ultimate focus on a very emotional aspect of the human mind, i.e. the desire to belong. Therefore her works constantly challenge the viewer and create a dialogue across all sections of the society.

Exhibitions

Selected Solo Presentation

In 2001, Hema Upadhyay exhibited her first solo show ‘Sweet Sweat Memories’ at gallery Chemould, Mumbai; in this exhibition, she exhibited some paintings which represented her thoughts and memories very beautifully. Hema Upadhyay’s experiments with the urban landscape complement her strategies of using the self-images as a photographic cut-out. In these works, she used gouache, acrylic, graphite and photographs on paper.

After that, she exhibited her installation work ‘The Nymph and the Adult’ 2001, institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, and Sydney. In this work Hema Upadhyay used cockroaches to symbolize death, ageing, and decay. It is well known that these insects have survived since the age of the dinosaurs, seemingly immune to extinction.
After this exhibition, she also displayed her work ‘Underneath’ 2004, Gallery Chemould, Mumbai. In this work she conjured up an image of a world that exists literally below the surface, mysterious, invisible and carries intimations about secrets and lies, about romance and violence. These paintings have been made with gouache, acrylic, graphite, and photographs on paper.

Hema’s next solo show was exhibited in 2008, ‘Universe Revolves On’, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore. In this show, she exhibited her work which was completed in a different technique, that is painting and installation. In these works, she used self-images in both techniques (painting & installation) in her unique style.

Her next solo show was exhibited in 2009 & 2010, ‘Where the Bees Suck, There Suck I’, reopening of Macro Museum, Rome Italy, and Studio La Citta, Verona Italy. In this installation work she made the slums of Mumbai. For this work, she used fiberglass, industrial dumper, and miniature huts made of car scrap, aluminum, plastic sheets, resin and enamel paint.

Her next solo show was exhibited in 2011, ‘Modernization’, Espace Topographie de l’Art, Festival D’ Automne a Paris, Paris. In this work she used miniaturized forms and materials; Hema Upadhyay creates ‘Romanticism’ in the revolt and the energetic striving that emerges from the squalor and inadequate conditions of the living structures. For creating this work, she used aluminum sheets, car scrap, enamel paint, plastic sheets, found objects, m-seal, resin and hardware material.
The next solo show was again exhibited in 2011, entitled ‘Princesses Rusted Belt’, Studio La Citta, Verona Italy. For Hema Upadhyay ‘The Princesses Rusted Belt’ has a strong social and ideological meaning. She herself had spoken about the ‘Princess Mill’, the first of many factories in Mumbai forced to close in 1960 as a result of too much competition. The closure of this firm was the sign of a change for the worse in the conditions of the Indian working classes; it was the cause of endless poverty, migration, and the uprooting of thousands and thousands of families. For this work, she has used acrylic, gouache, dry pastels and photographs on arches paper.

Hema Upadhyay’s next solo show was exhibited in 2012, ‘Mute Migration’, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. In this work the artist had made slums of Mumbai to represent her thoughts and feelings. This work was specially made for the ‘Chalo India’ show at the Mori museum in Tokyo. For this work, she had used aluminum sheets, car scrap, enamel paint, plastic sheets, found objects, m-seal, resin and hardware material.

Her next solo show was exhibited in 2012, ‘Extra Ordinary’, Faculty of Fine Arts Baroda, and Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi. In the repertoire of paintings, titled ‘Extra-Ordinary’, Upadhyay explores the subtexts that these two disparate words propose the ordinariness of an ‘extra’ life that the metropolis offers its citizens. The works are an amalgamation of painted surfaces and photographic cut-outs, shots of the real city encounter imaginary worlds, the artifice of globalization creating a bizarre beauty that holds onto itself through delicate threads. For these works, she used acrylic, gouache, dry pastels, photo cut-outs and photographs on arches paper.
Her next solo show exhibited was in 2013, it was again ‘Modernization’, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, USA.

**Selected Participations**

2001- 10th International Triennale - India, Rabindra Bhavan, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.

2003- Crossing Generations: Diverge, 40 years of Gallery Chemould, NGMA, Bombay.

- Portraits of a Decade, Cima Gallery Kolkatta & Jehangir Art Gallery Mumbai.
- Loco-Foco-Motto, produced during the Vasl Residency, Karachi, Pakistan.
- Parthenogenesis, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, Australia.
- The Tree from the Seed, Henie Onstad Kunssenter, Oslo, Norway.

2004- Have we met? Japan Foundation, Tokyo (Ex. Cat).


- Parallel Realities – Asian Art Now, 3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Fukuoka, Japan.
- Present-Future, National Gallery of Modern Art, Bombay.

2006- Lille 3000, Bombay: Maximum City, Tri postal, Bombay: Maximum City, Tri postal, Lille, France.

- Parallel Realities – Asian Art Now, 3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Blackburn Museum, UK.
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- 'Long Happy Hours Thereby Happiness & Other Stories'- Gallery Chemould at The Museum Gallery, Mumbai.

2007 - Urban Manners, Hanger Bicocca, Milan, Italy. India:
  - New Narratives, Chicago Cultural Centre, Chicago, USA.
  - India: New Installations Part II, Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, USA.

2008 - ‘Modern India’, organized by Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM) and Casa Asia, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture at Valencia, Spain.
  - Chalo! India – The New Era of Indian Art, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo.
  - Indian Focus, Espace Claude Berri, Paris, France.
  - 'Indi Genius', presented by Sakshi Gallery and Soka Contemporary Space, Taipei at Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai.
  - 'Eurasia, Geographic Cross-Overs in Art', Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (Mart) of Trento and Rovereto, Italy.
  - New Narrative, The Zimmerli Art Museum, New Jersey, USA.
  - 'Fire Walkers: Contemporary Artists from India and South Asia', Stux Gallery, New York.
2009- India 2: Mumbai - Under the Surface Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna, Austria.

- Indian Highway, Astrup Fernley Museum, Oslo, Norway.
- 'Conflicting Tales: Subjectivity (Quadrilogy, Part 1)', Burger Collection, Berlin.
- The Power of Ornamentation, Orangery Lower Belvedere, Vienna, Austria.
- India Xianzai, Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai, China.
- Essl Museum, ‘Chalo! India: A New Era of Indian Art’, Klosterneuburg, Austria (Travelling Exhibition).

2010-

- 2010-11 'In Transition: New Art from India', Richmond Art Gallery, Richmond, BC, Canada; Surrey Art Gallery, Surrey, Canada.
- ‘Place.Time.Play: India-China Contemporary Art’, West Heavens Exhibition Project, presented by Shanghai International Culture
Association, Institute of Visual Culture (China Academy of Art) at Shanghai Art Museum Lecture Hall, Shanghai.


- SAMTIDIGT," At the Same Time Gallery 5, Kulturhuset, Stockholm.

- Arts and Cities, Aichi Triennial 2010, Nagoya, Japan.

- Midnight’s Children, Studio Lacitta, Verona, Italy.

- Indian Highway Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark.


- 'Roots', 25th Anniversary Exhibition of Sakshi Art Gallery, Mumbai at the Park, Chennai.

2011:


- Spheres 4, Gallery Continua, le Moulin, France.

- Beyond the Self – Contemporary Self Portraiture from Asia, National Portrait Gallery Canberra, Australia (Travelling show).


- SAMTIDIGT, "At the Same Time", Helsinki City Art Museum, Helsinki.

- 'Indian Highway IV'- Lyon Museum of Contemporary Art, France.
- 'Regards Croisés: A Selection of Asian Contemporary Art'- Art Plural Gallery, Singapore.

- 'Maravee Fàbrica'- Castello di Susans, Italy.

- 'Where the Bees Suck, There Suck I', part of the Exhibition 'Density'- Schauraum-b, Basel, Switzerland.

- 'A Material Difference'- Paradox, Singapore.

- 'Concurrent India', Helsinki Art Museum, Tennis Palace, Finland.

2012:


- The Indian Highway, Curated by Julia Peyton-Jones, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Gunnar B. Kvaran in Collaboration with the Serpentine Gallery, London and the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo at The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing China.


- Beyond the self, -The Anne and Gordon Samstag Museum of Art Adelaide.

- Spheres 4, gallery Continua, le Moulin, France.

- 'Art for Humanity', Coomaraswamy Hall, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai.

- ‘Cinema City’ Majlis, National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai 'The Calendar Project: Iconography in the 20th Century', part of Project CINEMA CITY: Research Art & Documentary Practices presented by National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) and Ministry of Culture,
Government of India at National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Mumbai.
- ‘Density’, at Schauraum-b, Basel, Switzerland.
- Beyond the self –Contemporary self portraiture from Asia, National Portrait Gallery Canberra, Australia. (travelling show).

2013:
- Rosapiero, rosa tiepolo, rosa spalletti,rosa…..,studio la citta, Verona, Italy.
- Peak Shift Effect’, Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi
- ‘The Skoda Prize Show’, National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Ministry of Culture, Government of India in collaboration with The Skoda Prize at National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi.
- Beyond the Self, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin Australia.

**Special Projects**

1997- Good Mourning India, 150 Handmade Bookmarks, 50 Yrs of Independence, Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda.


2001- ‘Scribbles’ an installation of text with thread & fiberglass balloons, 10th International Triennale India, Rabindra Bhavan, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.
2001- The Nymph and The Adult, A site specific installation of 2000 Handmade Cockroaches, 10th International Triennale India, Rabindra Bhavan, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.

2002- This Space in between You & Me, a site-specific installation with soil and *ragi* seeds, Khoj International Workshop, Mysore.

2002- BYE, A site and time specific installation with pigeons at ‘Soonapan’ Kishengarh, Rajasthan.


2004- Dream a Wish, Wish a dream, an Installation, Grand Hyatt, Mumbai.


2011- ‘Only Memory has Preservatives’ Atelier Calder, Sache, France.


Hema Upadhyay is one of the amazing personalities and contemporary artists, who has achieved many awards in her young age and acquired a respected place in Indian art world. Due to her creative work, she attended national and international biennale and triennial exhibitions, workshops. She exhibited her work in the museum also.

In her young age and adventurous journey of art she did many solo exhibitions, at Mumbai, Australia, Paris, Italy, Brisbane, Sydney, and many other places. She
exhibited her highly thoughtful and beautiful work and represented India. In her young age, she had a lot of achievements, which were not easy to her being an artist and being a woman also. It’s the dream of every artist to achieve these kinds of awards and respect in the contemporary art world, which Hema achieved in her art journey. She was a stunning and a bold female artist who represented her thoughts and feelings very boldly with different techniques and styles, which have given her a unique place in the Art World.
References

1. Lavniya, Dr. M.M. Samajik Manovigyan, Research Publication, Delhi, Jaipur, pg.no-158.


5. Self from Artist.


7. Self from Artist.

8. Self from Artist.


