Resistance in Imaging Woman in Contemporary Visual Art of India: A Study of Five Artists

Abstract

Resistance in art is real but not a fact. It is a creative struggle against fact in a problematized situation for its transformation into a form that serves as an alternative to the world of facts, - a form that remains as an addendum to a culture in its history; it is real in this particular sense. It transcends the clichés about the reality which we experience everyday i.e. the reality of spoken facts. Resistance may not always be open and clear; it can go on continuing like a silent gesture archived in human history, -a gesture against all types of conventionalism, collective arrogance, hegemony, patriarchy, elitism and taken-for-granted attitude. It is a gesture exhibited in art production. Resistance consists in questioning any stereotyped version of life and reality and in art it brings forth an alternative. But they remain incorrigibly true, not simply in terms of representing a real form of life but mainly for asserting an alternative form of life both from aesthetic and axiological point of view. They resist any intrusion into and interference with that indigenous form of life. They speak for a tradition within tradition sometime absolutized from the socio-political hegemonic standpoint.

In contemporary Indian visual arts, woman is an Other from the post-colonial angle. Here the other is not merely a being that resembles the self and then gets separated from the self. This other with small 'o' develops his ego with a hope for an anticipated mastery over others: "In post-colonial theory, it can refer to colonized others who are marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the center and, perhaps crucially, become the focus of anticipated mastery by the imperial 'ego'." (Ashcroft, Bill et al, 1988, Post-Colonial Studies: Key Concepts, Routledge, London and New York.)
Against this backdrop, the form becomes more important in projecting women in contemporary Indian visual arts before the form becomes a subject for study. Arpita Singh’s comment is worth remembering in this context: “It is not a subject; it is form. The subject comes at the last moment when every form is in its place and made visible. That is why titles are not important in my work.” (Sen, Geeti 1996, Image and Imagination: Five Contemporary Artists, Mapin Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. Ahmedabad, p.98). This may be treated as a general methodological parameter for understanding and interpreting images of woman in some of the major works of the artists discussed here. The artists are Bikash Bhattacharya, Arpita Singh, Ravinder Reddy, Pushpamala N and Chandrima Bhattacharyya.