CHAPTER 5
DEVELOPMENT OF ABSTRACT TREND IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN PAINTING

Introduction

This chapter specifically traces the development of the language of abstraction found in the post-independence Indian painting. There are issues concerning this subject which affecting the contemporary field and those matters are related to various developmental aspects of various post-independence art movements. Subsequently, two questions are addressed: What developmental role has the international language of abstraction played in these regional areas. And how has a legacy of regional abstractionist discourse matured into a new language, informing contemporary Indian art practices?

It is very complex to understand the development of abstraction in Indian art; this is probably because of the fact that no singular, concerted 'movement' can be traced here; no community of artists with shared ideals and common characteristics registers a strong presence. Abstraction in Indian art is more of a series of individual stories of growth, artists developing their own visual language individually.

Abstract forms and shapes are originates from individual expressions. Every individual has his own individual constitution shaped by the aggregation of his vital spiritual, physical and mental qualities and capabilities that are quite evidently visible in his chosen approach and reflects his state of 'being' with his art and life. If we look at any abstract work in affirmation to this view, we can not only apprehend the individuality of an artist but can also decode his personal experiences manifested in his art. Perhaps this enduring interest to explore, the self' is the driving force behind the emergence of abstract tendencies and trends already existing in our thoughts and philosophies.

5.1. Madras Art Movement and development of Abstract Painting in South

Tracing the early instance of modernism in the contemporary art of Madras would mean studying the transformation from its origin. Development of the art had started in south with the establishment of the Government school of art and craft in
1850 in Madras. Madras school of was developed primarily to teach utilitarian arts and crafts. Pedagogic structure of the school was set according to craft-oriented syllabus.

For a long period of time the institute functioned in a kind of isolation. There was no significant modernist notion had been recorded in the Madras art school till the Indian independence. “Within this hallowed institution, two dominant personalities that left their indelible imprint were D.P. Roy Chowdhary and K.C.S Panikar. The Later especially combined in his pedagogy the study of European modernism with iconography of regional art forms that defined the terrain of regional for the group of the artists in the 60s.”

D.P. Roy Chowdhary was the first Indian artist, who becomes principal at the Madras School of Arts and Crafts in 1930. Roy Chowdhary had become instrumental for significant changes in the school both at the pedagogic and administrative level. His efforts helps in reforming the school that stopped being an institution for future drawing teachers and manufactory of exotic craft products and turned it into a school for creative artists. D.P. Roy Chowdhary was a great teacher, who inspires lot of students to become an artist. “Roy Chowdhary’s artistic lineage came from his teacher, Abnindranath Tagore and the Bengal school. As a painter, however he could not go beyond what he learnt from his teacher. His pictures in wash were soft and sentimental; it was only through his sensuous Rodinesque sculptures in stone, metal and concrete that he could express his creative energies. But since nearly all his works were commissioned, he attracted little critical attention and he turned his energies to developing creativity in his students.”

Later, K.C.S. Panikar had joined the Madras School in 1941. In early 50’s he had established himself as an artist and as well as teacher also. He had initiated a different pedagogical approach based on the study of twentieth century European stylistic movements including impressionism, post-impressionism and cubism. His own paintings of forties and fifties were highly influenced from the impressionist and post-impressionist styles. Around 1944, Panikar along with the some Madras based artists had founded the Progressive Painters’ Association in Chennai.

Early instance of abstraction in the contemporary art of Madras came with the landscape paintings of K.C.S. Panikar. His landscapes of Kerala emerge on his
canvas from the memory of his childhood days that he spent in Kerala. These landscapes were realistic representations of the subject with personalized brush strokes, which carried some features of the ‘abstraction’, specifically his use of colours and rhythmic brushstrokes in the picture space.

In 1954, he travelled widely in Europe and exhibited his works in London and Paris. His criticism directed towards his works, led him to an introspection of moving towards indigenous and local sources as a source of inspiration in his art. His passion and concern for Indian art grew deeper as he came into the see the works of European masters. At that time, Paniker had started his journey to discover his own formalistic intentions and stylistic interventions in the traditional and indigenous sources.

In 1957, he became the principal to the Madras School and started his new experiments in the pedagogy as well as in his painting practice. K.C.S. Paniker had made some significant changes that led to the emergence of the modern art movement, popularly known as the Madras Art Movement, particularly in the city of Madras and generally in the South. “…art institution for the matter of fact was the only institution in South India offering art education till the mid-1970s when other states in the south began offering similar programs. Hence many students with artistic aspirations and desire to become professional artists gravitated to the college from the states of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. The coming together of students from diverse regional background afforded an active interplay of dynamics in debates, discussion, arguments and interactive dialogues with artists like K.C.S.Panikar, S.Dhanpal, L.Munuswamy, A.P.Santhanraj among others. The dialogue marked the emergence of the Madras Art Movement, particular marking the ‘regional modern’ within the larger framework of the national modern.”

Panikar’s intention was to reinvent artistic forms derived from classical, folk and tribal art tradition with a contemporary sensibility. Panikar “…became acutely aware of the fact that the Indian artists were leading towards western modernist stylistic formulae, particularly abstraction. He initiated a debate amongst his colleagues and peer with a core group of students about what could define the ‘Indian’ identity particularly in the late 1950s. This identity crisis was felt
throughout the country, and Panikar found amicable solution in referring to the mining from the imagery and decorative tradition of the South Indian crafts, and folk and tribal art traditions."

Many artists from the South turned toward the regional or local sources for their inspiration and developed their own stylistic interventions, which were truly indigenous and modern. “When critically examined it can be pointed out that the Madras art movement which owed it visibility to the dedicated visions of innovators who were at the helm of affairs in the early 1960’s look as far back into the past as it does forward into future. Derivative from kolam, yantric diagrams, dance accoutrements, folk elements, wall paintings, inscriptions, canonical dynastic traditions are all historical references indicating that the charting of new trajectories does not happen arbitrarily or in a historical vacuum. New directions generally appeal to traditions, which have either been forgotten or not received their proper dues. And it is precisely this amnesia of tradition, which was highlighted and made the chief cursor within the Madras experience.”

Around 1963, K.C.S. Panikar was the first artist from Madras who turned towards abstraction in his search to develop a rational style of painting. Panikar developed a new abstract vocabulary in his works of ‘Words and Symbols’ series (Fig.5.1, 5.2). “Paniker had resolved a number of formal and ideological issues raised in the context of “nativism/Indianness” in his series ‘Words and Symbols’ (1963-77). He rejected the earlier mode of expressionistic brushwork and arrived at a highly graded, over-all flat pictorial space, over-laid with totally relaxed linear representational and abstract images.”

Panikar’s paintings of ‘Words and Symbols’ series was really significant development in his artistic journey. Panikar had used the signs, symbols and the scripts from the ancient Malyali hand-written manuscripts in his compositions. He painted his compositions in the thin layer of colours much like his early watercolours. His intention was to capture the visual effects for the mystical outcome rather than to be associated with specific meaning or message. In his compositions of ‘Words and Symbols’, Paniker had visualised the wide arrays of forms of life coming together in a design of sublime and mystery. “He used mythic
symbols and ancient scripts in patterns for aesthetic rather than spiritual impact. By adapting the ancient Indian visual vocabulary of signs and symbols, he made it clear that his intention was not metaphysical, but that as an artist, he was only trying to legitimize his contemporary expression. He insisted that the scripts he used were not intended to be read. Thus, the diagrams, the tabular forms, signs, and calligraphic flourishes had only a visual function.

In search of his indigenous expression, Paniker had undergone a deep research into the various forms of indigenous motifs to develop the visual language of his own expression. As part of his search for a new pictorial style, Paniker had studied the Indian horoscopes and Tantric table forms, observed scribbles of children, and learned the illustrated writings of Malyali handwritten scriptures on palm leaves. His ‘Words and Symbol’ series of paintings are the culmination of this intimate research, which represents the conceptual understanding of his inner vision.

“Paniker also definitively kept aside the spiritual (in an esoteric sense), and continued to remain within the figurative-narrative and expressionistic mode, concentrating much on the visual impact of his works. At the most, one may consider the dazzling brilliance and delight that manifests in most of his works of this phase as a celebration of an inner opulence and richness, much like an
imaginary paradise.”

In 1966, Cholamandla artist village had came into existence on the sea shore of village Injambakkam, a place, which was nine miles away from Chennai. Panikar along with some forty artists including painters and sculptors had founded the Cholamandal, an artist's village. It was a great experiment, where he came with the concept of living as a community. At that time Panikar was working as Principal in the Government School of arts and Crafts in Madras. He had already started his search for an art, as he described it, "Indian in spirit and world wide contemporary.”

Panikar’s objective was to establish such an artist’s village to make the artist self-dependant. As he wrote “…tired of the existing conditions of life and work of the creative worker in India today, some of the more restless painters and sculptors of Madras resolved that they would hence forth live a fuller life in society as creative artists. As paintings and sculptures did not sell sufficiently they would employ part-time, say, two or three hours a day, on creative handicrafts for an independent living. They would extend their art on to these. The major part of the day would be devoted to painting and sculpture. They had already found that the practice of commercial or private agencies as art teachers or designers were unsuitable as they permitted too little time for creative work of sustained character.” In this artist's community, art and craft co-existed in a mutual environment. Many significant artists and students including painters and sculptors from the Government school of arts and craft joined him in his mission. The late sixties was a significant period for artists of Cholamandal. They became established artists in the art world through late sixties and seventies.

Fig.5.3. Cholamandal Artists at Discussion
Panikar played a significant role in the development of modern art movement in south India. Paniker struggled for the identity of individual artist, gave him dignity, pride, and freedom. Being a painter, Panikar himself, lived and worked at Cholamandal village. Many painters and sculptors lived, worked and established themselves along with him. Their accomplishments made Cholamandal a success and created a legacy for K.C.S Panikar. As K.G.Subramaniyan wrote “…his role in the Indian Art world is even more illustrious; he led a generation of young artists to look into themselves and their surroundings; if it led some to these into certain preciosities it was not his fault. He made them think about art in a larger perspective; the artists’ village he founded in Cholamandal is a lasting proof of this. To persuade young artists to call off their dependence on commercial galleries and live in a kind of commune, living and working together, sharing their successes and failure, practicing art in a larger spectrum is a remarkable achievement; not only is the concept elevating, in the realities of our art situation it is a pragmatic one too. The survival of this village intact, with the same spirit and perspective, will be a living monument to his vision.”

In the late sixties, many artists had turned towards abstraction as a medium of their expression. They come with their own formalistic intentions and stylistic interventions rooted in the variety of sources. Some artists turned towards their own traditional and indigenous sources to create the vocabulary of their abstract vision. “The very late 60s witnessed many cataclysmic changes. Initially the guns were amid at abstractionists, when abstraction as a language was challenged. Particularly so, because the international abstraction in terms of Post Painterly abstractionism was widely accepted and popularized by Indian artists. To confront and resist its dominant influence many Indian artists turned to their tradition of Tantra, reinventing the already reductive yantric diagrams with their contemporary sensibilities. This was the most programmatic and compelling project in the 60s in search for national and cultural identity. This gave rise to the formulation of Neo-Tantric art within the Indian context with strong Indian character.” In Madras, this can trace in the works of many significant artists including K.C.Panikar, K.V.Haridasan, V.Viswanadhan and Akkitham Narayanan. Some artists had tried to explore themselves in the international idioms of abstract expressionism, among
them K.M. Adimoolam, L.Munuswamy, K.Damodaran and A.Viswam were really significant. These artists had played a significant role & contributed to the change in the contemporary Indian Art through their compelling vision of Indian modernity. Abstraction as practiced by these artists, belongs to the Madras Art Movement are different in its stylistic interventions.

In the seventies, Paniker had come to his last phase of his ‘Words and Symbols’ series. (Fig.5.4, 5.5) His canvases emerge in dark flat backgrounds with crowded scripts and symbols showed a certain transformation in his stylistic interventions. The mysterious abstract background of words and symbols started disappearing and paving way for simple linear spaces of unconventional landscapes. These informal, unconventional spaces brought a geography of its own, which inhabited the picture space with linear forms of water, trees, etc. (Fig.)

Fig.5.4 Words and Symbols, K.C.S. Panikar, 1976

Fig.5.5 Words & Symbols, K.C.S. Panikar, 1975
K.V. Haridasan is also a significant artist in the context of modern art movement in the Madras. He was one of the artist belongs to the first generation of artist who turned towards abstraction as a medium of his expression. Born in 1937 at Kannur, in Kerala, he studied art at Government College of Arts and Crafts in Madras. During his formative years K.C.S. Panikar had great influences on him. Haridasan had developed his personal style in abstraction during the course of his art studies in the Madras movement of the sixties. After completing his diploma studies in 1965, he underwent training in fresco painting at Banastahli on the government scholarship.

Haridasan became a major exponent of the neo-tantric movement, which originated in the 1970s. He had inspired from various discourse of Indian philosophy tantra including the concept of ‘Maya’. As he wrote “I am interested in very much in the concept of ‘Maya’. Appearance is nothing. There is something beyond the appearance of things which I believe is the area of truth. We can only get to know it on a metaphysical plane; not through the obvious, but through the unseen, belief, and faith.”

Haridasan creates his own language of metaphors both in geometric and biomorphic forms, which constitutes his mystical abstract compositions. His ideas of myth and symbols came to his paintings through his own experience to tantric philosophy. He had used various tantric symbolic motifs of sun, moon, lotus petals, star and oval shape in his compositions. All these forms, which he used in his

Fig. 5.6 Brahmasutra, K.V. Haridasan, 1975
compositions, he derived from the nature. “This again is an Indian concept, as I understand it, of looking at man and nature in single unified vision. In fact, at all existence as a unified cosmic scheme...I have chosen to interpret human aspects in terms of natural phenomena, for example, man in terms of fire and woman in terms of the petaled form...My whole concept of nature is in the terms of these opposites, of male and female, of the positive and the negative forces of life. The world, in fact, all existence, is the result of the union of these opposites each of which seeks its fulfillment in the other. And all the manifestations of energy like the sun, moon and nature animate and inanimate, are constituents of this all-pervasive concept of life.”

He affirms art to be the ultimate outcome of yogic bliss. (Fig.5.6)

Another important aspect about his paintings is the decorative structure of his compositions, which was largely based on the symmetrical arrangement of geometrical forms and textural surface of his canvases. As he himself said that “…to me that symmetry was a vital concept, specifically bilateral symmetry.” The geometric forms in his compositions become language of his expression. (Fig.5.7, 5.8)

L.Munuswamy, was a significant artist of the Madras Art Movement in the 60s and '70s. Although he was a more a figurative artist, but in the early sixties he had some abstract paintings to his credit. His abstract paintings had a close affinity with the abstract expressionism. He had created a language of his own vision, by the distortion of form and the colour juxtaposed with primeval expressions.
“Munuswamy abstracted the idea fields of energy flowing through his forms with the tremendous brushstrokes.”

He had evolved with a gestural approach in his compositions, which he derived from his earlier figurative paintings. (Fig. 5.9)

![Birds and Animals, L. Munuswamy, 1962](image)

Fig. 5.9. Birds and Animals, L. Munuswamy, 1962

K.M. Adimoolam was born in Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu. His aptitude for drawing at an early age made him move to Madras. He got his academic qualification in painting from the Government School of Arts and Crafts, Madras. Though his early work is figurative, the artist evolved his vocabulary over time through experiments with nature and abstract landscapes. Around 1970s, he had developed his own style of painting abstract landscapes entitle ‘Space’ series.

Adimoolam abstract works had a strong affinity with nature. His conceptual landscapes depict the constantly changing moods of Nature. In his compositions the varied forms of Nature seem to emerge from the apparently random strokes of colour on the canvas. “My canvases are neither representative of nature nor the perception of my mind. My works are not bound with words; they are purely concerned with vision. A vision that tries to reveal some untold truths from ‘Nature’”

(Fig. 5.10, 5.11)
His abstract landscapes are rendered in spontaneous flow of colors, conjuring up imagery of nature. Adimoolam had used a wide range of colour hues, including greens, blues, yellows, ocher in his compositions. His gestural strokes of palette knife had created a kind of energy in his compositions, which takes him much closer to the abstract expressionist. Adimoolam sought to depict the essence of nature in its totality by passing through it ‘in planes of colours’. “In paintings that grapple with and defy the predictability of the landscape, Adomoolam brushes aside all notions of optic reality. In the vision that he proffers, there is a promise of joy and clarity. Harmony does not lies in visual progression in one point or another, but in the movement, the rhythms, the play and vitality that each such work communicates. Colours appears in loose interlocking forms, their progress challenging logic, suggestively pitting icebergs with volcanic eruptions, green verdue with oceanic masses magnetizing the viewer to demand both a closer investigation and then propelling him back for a distant view to appreciate the work in its totality”\textsuperscript{17}

Akkitham Narayanan’s is also a significant abstract artist in the context of Madras art movement. He was born in traditional South Indian Brahmin family. He made his own style of painting based on the purity of geometry by synthesizing imagery of Indian Tantric tradition and European geometric art. Akkhitam
Narayanan studied art at the Madras College of Art and Craft, under the guidance of the K.C.S.Paniker. Panikar has not had a direct influence on his work; his teachings and guidance helps him to understand the Indian aesthetics and the fundamentals of art. After completing his studies he had joined the Cholamandal artist village.

Taking inspiration from K.C.S. Panikar he had started his artistic journey in the quest for his own expression rooted in Indian tradition. In late 60s, he went to Paris on a scholarship to study art there and settled down there. The Parisian experience provides him more deeper understanding to introspect his own works with a new vision. “His canvases became more and more refined. Irrespective of the medium, he experimented with colors and formal rhythms. Collapsing the figures into minimal forms, he naturally arrived at the field of geometric patterns, forms and shapes. Triangles, squares and circles, like individual instruments in a musical ensemble, started falling in place. Suggestions of the elemental aspects like fire, water, air, earth and ether started playing hide and seek in constructive designs of geometrical forms.”18 In the seventies, he had made a series entitled ‘Soundrya Lahiri’ which was significant in the development of his career.

He continuously used tantric symbolism into the compositional space of his pictorial language. “However, these paintings have something more to offer than mere formal values. Akkitham’s works evoke the sense of a threshold; a way that opens towards and closes from various possibilities. The metaphysical and spiritual interpretations could collapse into the metaphorical and metaphysical realm.”19

Fig.5.12. Untitled, Akkitham Narayanan, 1978. Fig.5.13. Untitled, Akkitham Narayanan, 2005
In his formation of his paintings, he divides the whole canvas into various geometric sections of plains, which constitute a formal structure of his compositions. He used subdued colours such as brown-black, ochre-red-white, blue-black. His rhythmic forms within the planer sections of composition had create a movement in the picture space. His artistic journey span across four decades but the formal structure of his composition had never changed. He continuously refined his style by exploring the various possibilities of geometry in his composition. (Fig.5.12, 5.13)

V. Viswanadhan was born in Kadavoor, a village in Kerala in 1940. He was born in the family of Kalamezhuthu artists, a community of ‘Vishwakarmas’ who made architectural plans of temples and houses and practice ritual paintings on the floors. He was trained at the College of Arts and Crafts in Madras under the guidance of K.C.S. Panikar. Viswanadhan evolved his personal style during the course of his training in Madras movement of the sixties. In his student days he was highly influenced from the paintings and teaching of K.C.S.Panikar.

He started his artistic journey with his experiments in the figurative painting in his ‘Agony’ series, but gradually turned towards his own individualistic expression of abstract imagery. In the early sixties he had introduced the Malayalam scripts in his art works. He was one of the founder members of the Cholamandal Artists' Village in Madras in 1966 and made his cottage with his fellow students R.B.Bhaskarn and K.M.Adimoolam. At Cholamandal he had started his experiments with geometry, and tantra. “In those early days in the artists’ colony, Viswanadhan began to experiment in real earnestness with geometrical abstraction and symbols.”

Fig.5.14. Red Painting, V.Visawnnadhan, 1967.  
Fig.5.15. Untitled,V.Visawnnadhan, 1972
In the late sixties, Viswanadhan, inspired by the geometrical ritualistic-diagrams of his native Kalamezhuthu paintings, began to explore the visual language inherent in them. He had arrived at the simplification of his visual imagery with inverted triangles on the picture space in the bright and warm colours. “Red (throbbing, energy-emanating) dominates Viswanadhan’s pallet in the late 1960s. The geometrical forms foaling in, or held by red, now acquire more individualistic shorthand-less ‘Tantric’ and more ‘Viswanadhansque’ you could say”\textsuperscript{21} In this period he had painted some significant paintings such as ‘Red Painting’ (Fig.5.14)

Viswanadhan had not used the tantric imagery directly from the ancient sources, he created his own vocabulary of abstract geometrical forms. “Even though Viswa had sound knowledge of iconic significance of our ritualistic paintings and diagram, he never employed it as a theatrical prop to support his work but embedded them within his painted image.”\textsuperscript{22} (Fig.5.15)

In 1968, he had went to France for an exhibition and settled there for the rest of his life. In Paris, his experiments broke a new ground with his material and techniques, such as blending turpentine with stamp ink and oil colours, watercolours with oil and acrylic with oil surfaces. In the early years of Paris, he started to to work with large size paintings. His imagery comes from the varied geometrical forms, which are associated with the Tantra. “…large canvases using a mixed technique offer a luxurious variety of colours covering the canvas with exuberant forms in a kind of ‘all over’. Vital energy is expressed. His texture consists of thick
coat of vividly coloured pigments which produce effects of density through a succession of overlapping layers” In the mid-seventies, he used to paint with minimal colours in his compositions. His subdued colours such as brown, yellow and ochre makes his paintings more sophisticated and austere. And later on the eighties his colours becomes monochromatic.

Around mid-nineties, he had developed a new gestural structure in his paintings. He had started to work with board layers of colours with a limited colour palette consists of red, green and yellow. His intention was to create a non-objective image devoid from any representation as he said “A painting is neither an object nor a resemblance. It is a non-object, an image that beholds the power, the presence. It does not represent, it does not reproduce, it exists.”

K.Jayapal Panicker was a also a significant artist in the context of Madras art movement. He was born at Perinad in Kerala in 1937. He came to Madras with his friend V.Viswanadhan to study painting at Madras School of art and craft in 1960.

In his early phase of his career, he was highly influenced from the paintings of K.C.S. Panikar. Jayapal began exploring ideas and forms that related specifically to the ancient Hindu symbology, as well as a variety of traditional and religious literary and visual sources. However by the late 1960s Jayapal’s art was finding a new pictorial language of his own based on philosophy of Vedanta and imagery inspired largely from nature. “To him all creation is nothing but self manifestation, like the Lila of Viratapurusha, the creator of the entire cosmic world. All Vedanta philosophy is an attempt at the solution of the probem of the One and the Many. The ultimate reality is Sat-Chit-Anand, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. The essence of man is identical with this reality, but under the influence of maya, illusion, he has forgotten his true nature. What he takes for real is merely an apparent world of subject and object, and this error is the cause of his bondage and suffering. The goal of all spiritual practice is the rediscovery of his true identity with the reality. For Jayapal, his artistic journey is a search for that identity”
His early invocation to primordial elements had led to the visual of multiplicity. His compositions of ‘Archaic Memories’ series were abstract in character reflecting the deeper understanding of his native tradition. In the late seventies, he had started his new works based on metaphysics with his own personal expression.

In the late eighties, Jayapal was inspired by the texture and forms of nature. He was fascinated by the internal expression that symbolizes the cosmic rhythms of organic forms and the movements of galaxy. In his ‘Parimanam’ series, (Fig.5.19, 5.20) Jayapal believes in creating these forms as process of achieving artistic delight or to evoke emotion in the viewers. “Jayapal tried to negate the everyday material
level of reality as a figment if imagination as maya. He believes that when one receives illumination and comes to know the Self, one cease to submit to the domination of maya."^{26}

K. Damodaran is also a significant artist who chooses abstraction as medium of his expression. He was born in Thalassery in Kerala. He studied painting at the Government College of Arts and Crafts in Chennai. He studied painting under the guidance of K.C.S. Panikar. During his study at Madras school, he became aware to the notion of Western modernism. The knowledge of various avant-garde movements of European art particularly impressionism, post-impressionism, cubism and expressionism inspired him to experiment with the structure of form and the application of colours. Panikar as a teacher had a great influence on him but he never explored his personal expression within the trajectories of indigenous sources.

Fig.5.21. Untitled, K. Damodaran.                                       Fig.5.22. Untitled, K. Damodaran

His landscapes are illuminated by what he sees and perceives in nature which are translated in various ways on the surface of his canvas. His conceptual portrayals of landscapes are different from the routine landscapes. His landscapes are devoid of forms and almost like a blur with the criss-crossing of colour brush strokes. Damodaran had developed an abstract language in his gestural brushstrokes, which filled the space across his canvas. His coloured strokes either with brush or palette knife are traces of varied biomorphic forms, painted in their spatial relations with each other. His gestural approach is important in the formation of his work. “Automatism and chance play an important part in Damodaran's paintings. One can offer an existentialist interpretation of his abstract works by emphasizing the individual's soul and spirituality. This is a practice revealing artist’s ‘interiority’.
Traditional theories and supporting practices have maintained that the emotions are the preserve of the individual and this augments well for Damodaran’s works, particularly his exploration through schema of colours.”

In south, many artists choose abstraction as medium of their expression, among them Surya Prakash, Achuthan Kudallur, A.Viswam, Amitbh Sengupta, M.S.Murthy, K.S.Nagure, Athiveera Pandian and Bhagwan Chavan are really significant.

5.2. Development of Abstract Painting in Baroda

The story of modern art movement in Baroda had been largely associated with the story of faculty of fine arts in M.S. University in Baroda. Faculty of fine arts had been instituted in M.S. University in 1950, which introduced the degree courses in the stream of visual arts. This was the first instance that evolves the courses of visual arts to the university level. Institute incorporated in its syllabus in painting and sculpture, graphic arts and applied arts along with the aesthetics and art history creating an advanced educational system. Hansa Mehta was the first vice-chancellor of the newly built university. She was liberal in her approach towards constructive academic climate and intellectual growth. In 1949, Markand Bhatt from the Barnes Foundation was invited to set up the faculty of fine arts in the University. She also invited some major figure of Indian art to help the new establishment at Baroda, which includes artists K.K.Hebbar, V.P. Karmarkar, Ravishankar Rawal, Somalal Shah, Siavax Chavda and Hermann Goetz. N.S.Bendre, Pradosh Das Gupta and Sankho Choudhuri were also joined as the faculty. All these enthusiastic teachers along with others had started the Baroda experiment in fifties.

Markand Bhatt was a true educationist with a progressive vision. He painstakingly designed an educational curriculum based on his own training at the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, but with an Indian orientation. “The different systems of art education which were incorporated through syllabi and by the virtue of the background of the respective teachers brought new meaning to term ‘skill’ and diverse method of imparting it. The post-Bauhaus methodology of some of the American art schools helped introduce notions of the fundamentals of visual design. Empirical aspects of perception and the isolation of abstract properties, such as
form, shape, colour, texture and line came in detached, objective investigation. Thus, a set of simplified codes for training visual perception and sensitivity to different materials was seen as basic to the eventual skills of visual organization.\textsuperscript{28}

A new pedagogic approach was adopted in Baroda, in which more emphasis had been given to the individual growth of the artist. “Individual experimentation is encouraged with the various materials and with the basic means of expression (or component of art) like shape, colour, line, texture, volume, and space in order to understand their nature and inner-relations. With such an equipment one is set on the road of the creative adventure bringing out one’s own inner self…Thinking more in terms of formal means rather than the illustrative content has instigated the stress on ‘design’ and ‘structure’. (This is important to note because much painting produced in India during the first 50 years of this century seems to lack in both these fundamental aspects of art.) This preoccupation with ‘structure’ has revealed the pertinence of Cubism and Abstraction and the interest in ‘design’ has brought into proper focus the chief quality of Indian miniatures that excites the modern sensibility.”\textsuperscript{29}

![Fig.5.23. The Plant, N.S.Bendre.](image1)

![Fig.5.24 Untitled, N.S.Bendre](image2)

At that time N.S. Bendre was an important painter, who had been widely exhibited and traveled when he joined the faculty as head the department of
painting. In 1950, he had joined the faculty of fine arts as a Reader and Head of Department of painting. He had got his formal education in art from Indore school of art. In his early career Bendre primarily works were landscape and portraits in Impressionists style. During his early period in Baroda, he had begun his experiment with varied styles of painting including expressionist and cubist tendencies. “Like many artists of his generation, he too believed in mastering all the techniques and mediums. His technical versatility still makes Bendre a unique among the living artists of India and has been an asset to him as a teacher.”

His paintings of this period such as ‘The Sunflower’ and ‘The Thorne’ were significant examples of his cubist leanings.

Bendre was a figurative painter, but in late sixties, after his visit to America he turned towards cubist-abstract and abstract tendencies. During this phase he had started his new experiments with drip colours and gestural strokes much like abstract expressionist manner. “His researches into colours took a new turn around 1958 at the same time he gave up the earlier preoccupation with Indian subject matter…He brought into play his formidable sense of design and his sub-conscious, creating strange forms and effects, which are normally impossible to render consciously. But these were only transitory digression, to enable the mind to purge itself of thinking in terms of object and in terms of subject-matter. Bendre’s plunge into abstraction
may seem sudden. But his primary preoccupation with structure and reducing things to bare essentials already almost boarded on Abstraction and next step to be taken was only logical.\textsuperscript{31} (Fig.5.23, 5.24)

Bendre was an influential teacher in the faculty, who also emphasis on the aesthetic values besides the formal training of the students. “Bendre felt that an artist should have an open mind and should be able to derive inspiration from all facets of contemporary culture as a whole. It was only then that we could make his own contribution to it. It was only then that the need was not to produce craftsman-artists but to develop intelligent artist through the training that was imparted in the faculty.”\textsuperscript{32}

In 1956, N.S. Bendre also becomes instrumental to formed a group of Baroda trained students and artist named ‘Baroda Group of Artists’. Many of the first generation of his students at Baroda, were members of the Group, including Sankho Chaudhuri, N.S. Bendre, Shanti Dave, G.R.Santosh, Triloke Kaul, Nasreen Mohamedi, Gulam Mohammed Sheikh and later Bhupen Khakhar, Jeram Patel and K.G. Subramanyan also joined. The group consists a wide range of experiments in Abstraction, Pop Art and Neo-Dada considerably deepened Indian art's engagement with modernism. Group held regular exhibition in Bombay, Ahmadabad and Baroda, extensively showcasing the works collectively.

In the late fifties and intermittently over the next two decades, the centre of artistic endeavour seemed to shift to Baroda, where the Fine Arts department of M. S. University had been very ambitiously put together. The result was the collective of practitioners, the Baroda Group (including artists Sankho Chaudhuri, N.S. Bendre, Nasreen Mohamedi, Gulammohammed Sheikh and later Bhupen Khakhar, Jeram Patel and K.G. Subramanyan), whose experiments in abstraction, Pop Art and Neo-Dada considerably deepened Indian art's engagement with modernism.

In the early sixties, abstraction in art becomes a worldwide phenomana. Many Indian figurative painters tured towards abstraction as a medium of their expression. “Abstract art became leading current in Indian art of 1957-67, when India and her culture came under increasing american dominance…But abstraction was not a significant trend of the country till the sociologist situation had ripened for
In 60s many young artists, who were trained at Baroda, took abstraction as a medium of their expression. Among them Shanti Dave, G.R.Santosh, Trilok Kaul, Himmat Shah were significant.

Shanti Dave is also a significant artist in the context of modern art movement in the Baroda. He was one of the artists who belong to the first generation of the Baroda trained artist who turned towards abstraction. He was born in 1931 in Badpura village situated in North Gujrat. In 1950, Dave joined the Faculty of Fine Arts of the MS University in Baroda, where he completed his postgraduate studies in painting. During his formative years N.S. Bendre had great influences on him. In his early works, which were mostly figurative, he developed a decorative style by assimilating the elements from miniature paintings and cubism.
In the late fifties he had turned towards abstract landscapes in his compositions, which were almost painted with broad strokes with brush or knife in subdued colours. (Fig.5.26, 5.27) He created a certain kind of mysterious atmosphere, a moment of stillness in his abstract landscapes. Texture is an important element in his painting, which he created through the use of pigment with wax. “Gradually he gave up the use of such extraneous material like sand because he felt that whatever one intends to do so on canvas should be done with sheer paint. For impasto work he found a substitute in the form of wax medium. Pigment mixed with wax could be handled like mortar marking it possible to treat the painting almost like a sculptural relief.”

(Fig. 5.28, 5.29)

Fig.5.30. Untitled, Shati Dave, 1990.  
Fig.5.31. Untitled, Shati Dave, 1994

His abstract landscapes were based on aerial perspective, which presents a city like structure in the composition. He derives his visual information and enthusiasm from nature, and then departs into abstraction. A celebration of the painting materials for their own sake is a primary factor in one of his luxurious textured in painting. Dave had used the highest quality pigments to achieve his distinct surface manipulation techniques. “The surface is now not only the obsession but the painting for him has become manipulation of the surface. (The extensive mural decoration executed by him have also contributed to his obsession with the wall). More than an inch thick over a large patch or it may protrude out at places. Contrasted with it are vast surfaces built up a transparent glazes. Such a
juxtaposition of flat and raised surface creates interesting spatial ambiguities. The space creating nature of colours also added to these ambiguities.³⁵ (Fig. 5.29)

In his later paintings of seventies, he introduced the calligraphic elements in his compositions. His use of the such calligraphic rendering had a tactile quality, which inhabited the space of his canvases. His composition also shows his deep understanding of design and decorative elements in painting. “His decorative schemes of colour, processing a magnificent shimmer and spreading themselves over the pictoral space create a kind of surreal colour effect or spiritual aura in ‘a form-space-light syntyesis’. Shanti shows himself capable of asserting as a fine colourist. Each of his paintings is arresting for its purely optical topography, a true feast for the eye ; a fascinating inner spectacle of colour music.”³⁶ He succeeded in exploiting the plastic elements in his compositions. (Fig.5.30, 5.31)

Triloke Kaul had come to Baroda in 1952 to study painting. He was born in 1925 in Kashmir. He was already an established landscape artist when he joined the faculty of fine arts at Baroda. During his tenure at Baroda he had started his experiments in Kashmiri landscapes with cubist vocabulary. In his later period, he transformed his landscapes into the flat intersection of colour plains. “His approach to painting also originated from landscape. Primarily the architecture of Kashmiri houses in space set his fantasy free. Throughout he remained true to the cubistic, analytic procedure to solve the problems of space, movement and colour. What first
seemed to be a patch of colour on canvas, soon developed into a motion that immediately arrested your whole attention. He kept calculating like a mathematician all the steps needed to solve the problem.”

G.R. Santosh had joined the faculty of fine arts in 1953 on the government scholarship to study painting under the guidance of N.S. Bendre. Before joining to the faculty, he was already a established poet in Kashmir. He was born in 1929 at Srinagar, in a lower middle class family. In Baroda, Santosh had learned almost all the techniques in span of two years tenure of his scholarship. In his formative years at Baroda he had started his experiments with landscapes influenced from the geometrical distortion of the cubism.

In the early sixties, he gradually turned towards abstraction. and started to compose abstract landscapes also. He had created a extraneous texture in his compositions by the use of sand and colour in impasto method of palette-knife. “More and more he tends to base his paintings on an over-all design with rather uniform texture. The texture is built up of what seem minute linear ridges. They tend to appear like landscapes vaguely resembling snowy mountains or rugged rocks. If one hand they appear to be stimulated by nature, they also seem to come from within, which gives an added picaresque to the paintings.”

In the mid-Sixties, a mystical experience in the Amar Nath cave proved a turning point in his life. He gave up the painting for certain period of time and delves deep into the study of Tantra and Kashmiri Shaivism. Later, inspired by the
Tantra philosophy, he had developed a new style of abstract painting. In the seventies, G.R.Santosh becomes the major exponent of the Neo-Tantra art in India. (Fig.5.34)

During the sixties, many artists who were trained at the faculty of fine arts in Baroda, had turned towards abstraction for certain period of time. Among them Prafull Dave, Bal Krishan Patel, Kishori Kaul and Vinod Shah were significant.

During the 50s and 60s Western influence had been dominated on the Indian art scene. Many significant artists in India had been working with the Western idioms including post-Impressionism, Cubism and Abstract Expressionism. At that time many significant artist feel a strong need for the indigenous expression in their respective approaches and derivative styles. “A culminative reaction to international began to emerge in the later half of the 1950s and the early 1960s. One of the main issue that arose was the doubt about the validity and relevance of following alien European modernists art styles. Indegeneous ideology raised question about Western orientation as being derivative and provoked doubts about authenticity and question of national identity”.

In the early sixties, a pan-Indian art group named ‘Group 1890’ had emerged on the India art scene. The group incuded J.Swaminathan, Jeram Patel, Jyoti Bhatt, Raghav Kaneria, Ambadas, Himmat Shah, S.G.Nikam, Rahjesh Mehra, Gulam Mohamed Sheikh, Balkrishan Patel, Redeppa Naidu, and eric Bowen. The group brings its name from the number of the house of Jyoti Pandya, in Bhavnagar where the first meeting of the group had been held in august 1962.

The group had their first exhibition at Rabindra Bhawan in New Delhi in 1963. The exhibition was inaugurated by the prime-minister than Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and presided by the Mexican poet, Octavio Paz. The group rejected the idea of adoption of the techniques of Western art movements, which were prevailing among the Indian art practice. In the group manifesto Swaminathan wrote “From its early beginnings in the vulgar naturalism of Raja Ravi Verma and the pastoral idealism of the Bengal school, down through the hybrid mannerisms resulting from the imposition of concepts evolved by successive movements in modern European art on classical, miniature and folk styles to the flight into ‘abstraction’ in the name
of cosmopolitanism, tortured alternately by memories of a glorious past born out of a sense of futility in the face of a dynamic present and the urge to catch up with the times so as to merit recognition, modern Indian art by and large has been inhibited by the self-defeating purposiveness of its attempts at establishing an identity.⁴⁰

The group had their own views about the artists and the art as their manifesto further explains “For us, there is no anticipation in the creative act. It is an act through which the personality of the artist evolves itself in its incessant becoming, moving towards its own arrival….Art is neither conformity to reality nor a flight from it, it is reality itself, a whole new world of experience, the threshold for the passage into the state of freedom.”⁴¹

The ‘Group 1890’ had disintegrated after a short span of time as Himmat Shah and Gulam Mohamed Sheikh went to London for further studies and Ambadas went to Norway and settled there. Many efforts had been made to revive the group by the J.Swaminathan, Jeram Patel and Himmat Shah, but among the group members, very few artists continued to followed the spirit they presented in the manifesto. Many significant artists of the group had developed their own style of abstraction in their compositions. Among them Jeram Patel, J.Swaminathan, Ambadas, Himmat Shah, Rahesh Mehra and Eric Bowen were really significant.
Jeram Patel was one of the significant artists who contributed immensely towards development of abstraction in the Indian art. Jeram Patel was born in 1930 in Sojitra, Gujrat. He had got his formal education from J.J.School of Art. At J.J School, he was taught under Shankar Palsikar and V.S.Gaitonde. After completing his diploma studies at J.J.School, he went to London, where he studied Graphic Design at the Central school of Art and Craft in London. His studies in London had given him a new perspective towards art and imagination. While his stay at London, he had regularly visited to the various museums and exhibitions, which provide him an opportunity to see the works of the masters of the European art. Which further helps him to turn towards painting, yet he was trained as a designer. In his formative years, he usually made drawings in Black ink.
In the early sixties, he had joined the faculty of fine arts as a reader in the applied art department. In his early years in Baroda, he had started his experiments in mixed media works with varied extraneous material such as enamel paint, wood, zinc powder, sand, and fevicol. He usually paints in thick layer of paint on the wood based surface, on which he also attached the metal scrap with nails. His mixed media works of the early sixties were completely abstract in their character. “The assemblages of clashing materials and charring of plywood suggest that Jeram emphasized the manipulation of the material itself and the immediacy of the mark made, not representation Jeram explicitly disclaims any creation of a pictorial image, considering it an imposition on the numinous.”\(^{42}\) He had begun his works as an individual spirit as he did not want to follow any particular style. His education and experience at Europe inspired him to work with new materials. His works like ‘Gestalt in Tin’ (Fig.5.37), ‘Plain in Colours’ (Fig.5.36) and ‘Study in Silence’ (Fig.5.38) were significant in the context of abstraction in Baroda.

In the next phase of his artistic journey was the use of the blow torch on the laminated wood panel. He develops a new abstract vocabulary with his much distinct technique of making the painting by burning the wood surface with blow torch. Later, he used to create the boimorphic forms in his works by gauging the layers of plywood. And then, he render the form by the blowtorch and fill the ungogged area with flat layer of the emanel paint. He usually had used the bright colours such as red and yellow in his compositions.

![Fig.5.39. Untitled, Jeram Patel, 1965.](image1)

![Fig.5.40. Untitled, Blow Toruch, Jeram Patel, 1969](image2)
Later in mid-seventies he came back to the canvas. He usually started making drawings in black ink, in which he had a great interest since his formative years. Like his mixed media works, he also created biomorphic forms in his drawings, which were mostly abstract had not had any significant relation to the natural world. Jeram had created a language of his forms which were very personal to his expressions. “With no apparent relation to the outside world, these forms well up on to the paper in their amoebic formation and disintegration with no end or direction.”

Throughout his long career Jeram Patel continuously showed his passion for black colour in his drawings and mix-media works. As he said “Black has always fascinated me. It has a mystery of its own, also has an enchanting quality. It is very strong and hits your senses, whenever, wherever you are in the front of black. It seems that black in itself carries a many things, no one knows deposited by whom, and when.” (Fig.5.41)
Jeram’s four decade long journey in art was full of experiments in painting specifically in the context of abstraction. In the early twenty-first century, he returned back to his gauged plywood, blow torch works with flat colour background. (Fig.5.42, 5.43) But now his central biomorphic form sub-divided into several smaller forms, which seemed to be arranged arbitrarily on the surface. Jeram Patel is really, one of the most innovative and radical artist in the development of the abstract art in India.

Himmat Shah’s was also an important artist in this context. Shah was born in 1933 at Lothal in Gujarat. He had studied painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts of M.S. University, Baroda, from 1956 to 1960. He had visited to France on French Government scholarship to study etching at Atelier 17, Paris in 1967. From his formative years, Shah had a great interest in drawings. His drawings are much like the doodling. (Fig.5.44) His abstract drawings are transformative and free form of expression, it appealed to him in his negotiations with form and space. His drawings are spontaneous expression of the unconscious mind, which never seems predictable. “In them Himmat seems to play with his sub-conscious reflecting his personal conflicts and inner torments”145

Nasreen Mohamedi was also a significant artist in the context of modern art movement in India. Her paintings and drawings were abstract in character and had a unique place within the geometrical minimalism. She was born in 1937 in Karachi
(now in Pakistan). She moved with her family to Bombay in 1944. She had studied painting at Saint Martin's School of Art in London. She also studied for some time at Monsieur Guillard's private atelier in Paris, where she encountered with art of modern European masters. After extensive travels in the 1960s, she returned to Bombay. In mid sixties, she found a place to practice painting at Bhulabhai Desai Memorial Institute in Bombay. At Bhulabhai center, she also came into contact with artists such as V.S.Gaitonde and Tyb Mehta.

During his formative years Gaitonde’s abstract works had a great impact on her painting, which is visible in her paintings of earlier period. In early period in Bombay, she often paints abstract landscapes in almost monochromatic colours. Most important aspects about these paintings are her gestural approach in paintings, which was in contrast with the works of her later period. “These early works form the late fifties and sixties show the spontaneity of Chinese and Japanese painting. They display bold calligraphic strokes, made more often by a free movement of her wrist than by the control of fingers she used in the ink washes of her later pen and ink drawings”46 She usually mixed the oil and ink to create an extraneous effect on the surface of his paintings. She also emphasizes on the multiple techniques to achieve the desired result in the composition, which includes the rendering with the tip of the brush and use of the roller to create the tension on the surface of her canvas. In her earlier paintings she had used colours in some of her paintings, but gradually she turned towards monochromatic schemes. (Fig.5.45, 5.46)
In 1972, she had joined the faculty of fine arts at M.S.University, Baroda and settled there. In Baroda, she had turned towards the geometric abstraction, in which she usually rendered her drawings by the pen with the use of scale, were mostly small scale drawings on paper. Lines in her drawings were really important as they come from all directions and in varied forms; vertical, horizontal and diagonal. “Nasreen’s work makes a definite move away from nature-bound imagery in the direction of abstraction. Giving up the free, calligraphic brushstroke and its immediate tonal and textural seductions, she begins to use straight lines measured and drawn with the help of geometrical scale.”\(^{47}\) (Fig.5.47, 5.48) Later, she gradually moves toward the grid like formation in her drawings. In this phase she also produced her abstract photographs based on her visits to Arabian Desert and Fatehpur Sikri. Later, she had used rhythmic lines in the formations of her minimalist drawings.

Later in the eighties, she had eliminated the grid from her drawings and reduced the structures and spaces to the patterns of diagonal lines and planes. Her meticulous rendered ink drawings show a precision in its formation and seem to plunge in the perpetual space. “Nasreen’s work is immersed in perpetual reality rather than an inward landscape. This difference, if seen as her ‘chose’, my probably also explain the shift from the calligraphic approach of her earlier work to grid of the seventies. It is a move away from a romantic association of spontaneous gesture with the inner, mystical being of the artist towards a mode of plotting breeze on precise graph, or measuring light by thinning ink in its relationship to the white paper.”\(^{48}\) (Fig.5.49, 5.50)
Nasreen Mohamedi had an intuitive understanding of her mystic lines and their nuances. This helps her to go ahead with considerable felicity till she comes to the point of final reckoning with the inner necessity. Nasreen had created her own language in her abstract drawings which was very personal to her expressions. “Few India artists have been concerned with the problem of visual perception. With Nasreen, seeing is concentration. The eye that habitually receives sense impressions must both intuit the patterns of experience and discover their inner logic. It is this faculty of balance – somewhere between mathematics and mystery – that distinguishes her as an oriental.”

Abstraction in art is not mere a technique, nor just thoughtless dalliance with forms and colours, nor again just matter of banishing all familiar forms that are given in our common experience. It is something far deeper and requires one to reflect on the very core of an experience and its internal dynamics. Nasreen, through her three decade long career shows a great sensibility towards abstraction.

In seventies and eighties, abstraction was not a dominant choice for the students and practicing artists there. Faculty was dominated by the narrative style in all the respective mediums because of the pedagogical structure, which was largely devised according to the narrative mode initiated by the K.G.Subramanyan and Gulammohammed Sheikh. In the nineties, “…individual practices, more than ever before, are adjusted to the global art trends and market conditions, which to a large extent render the subjectively determined individual choice in terms of personal
search, sensibility options and linguistic negotiations.50 A few students in Baroda also had chosen abstraction as their medium of their expression. Among them Ajay Desai, B.V.Suresh, Gargi Raina, Manisha Parekh, Smiti Dixit, Ganesh Gohain, Santana Gohain and Niyati Chadha Kannal are really significant.

Manisha Parekh, had completed his post-graduation from the M.S.University, Baroda in 1990 and she went to London to study at Royal College of Art. Manisha serves as an apprentice in France at Cite Inter-national des Arts, Paris. She works in a abstract or non-narrative small format works. She usually created the small format works to makes a set of organic forms that grows into compositions. She constantly reinvents her abstract vocabulary as an artist. She had made lot of experiments with the use of varied extraneous materials in her compositions. As she states “The choice of materials feels like a journey- each has a character. Time spent working reveals possibilities’ and process of understanding. There is a sense of give and take once works begins and the material starts to guide and show you how to use them. It is an open-ended journey.”51 Her works such as ‘The Red Work’, ‘Swirls and Strips’ and ‘Letter, That Fades’ were significant in the context of abstract creations.
In her work ‘Strips and Swirls’ (Fig.5.51) Manisha had made layering the sheets of paper, and then she positions one paper on another, creating layers, each one unpredictable till it was assembled. Each rectangular works was one frame of a mosaic. On the other hand, In her work ’The Red Work’ (Fig.5.52) she work with watercolors and gouache. Manisha through her small format abstract works had created a language of her expression, which was very personal to him.

Gargi Raina is also an important artist in the context of abstraction. She belongs to New Delhi but completed her post-graduation in painting at faculty of fine arts in Baroda. She gradually turned towards object based abstract paintings from her earlier figurative style. Her abstract forms are inspired from nature, by which she had created her world of biomorphic objects. “Gargi does not see nature as a construct of ‘maya’, which needs to be aggressively decoded – instead, she defamiliarises and represents the normal rhythms of nature.” Her painting ‘Earth Movers’ (Fig.5.54) are really important in this context, in which Gragi depicted the microscopic transformation of the earth worm from egg to birth. In a similar painting such as ‘Hexagonal Transformation: A Conversation with Nasreen’ (Fig.5.53), she had worked with structural geometry of nature. She had painted a transformation of the structure of honey-comb. “Gargi diverges from Nasreen’s antiseptic structural purity specifically by injecting bodily experience, the corporal presence into her works”

Fig.5.53. Hexagonal Constructions (A Conversation with Nasreen), G.Raina, 2000. Fig.5.54. Earth Movers
She works in segments of small format paintings, which assemble collectively and made a single body of work. “The specific objects chosen for microscopic meditation are represented with subtly nuanced minimalism. Treated with the diffused monochromatic light and dark effects, the segmented, and then framed, compositions of multiples speak of transformation of objects in time and space, the gentle lyricism, thus, re-creating the magical presence of the objects.”54

Smriti Dixit had received her formal education in art from the Faculty of Fine Arts at M.S. University, Baroda, in 1994. She had made experiments with the variously textured fabrics and plastics in her compositions. Through the use of extraneous materials like cloth and thread, she had created a much distinct style of abstraction in which she includes the traditional art of sewing. That shows, she is familiar with the centuries old craft of sewing, practice by many Indian women. She acknowledges this craft and individualizes it by incorporating varied textures and patterns into her abstract compositions. In her unique compositions she had deal with variety of geometric as well as organic forms, which is also an important aspect about her works.

Her process of making her art works is also an important entity. She often tears the cloth, only to stitch back to her work. She embraces the processes of
experimentation and creation to communicate the concepts of rebirth, recycling and renewal. Once she feels a piece is complete, she makes no attempt to tidy the surface. Her compositions suggest the intuitiveness of her creative process. Her abstract compositions “…neither a sunshine abstraction where mandalas are celebrated by rot, nor is it a self-obsessed abstraction that expects its every drip and smear to be treated as a mystical revelation. Smriti experiments constantly with her material and her vocabulary, and has the courage to confront a grand failure rather than producing works that shelter behind the safety cordon of mediocrity.”\(^{55}\) (Fig.5.55)

Ganesh Gohain, who had trained as a sculptor at M.S.University, but he also made some experiments in abstract composition, which are really important in the context of material, technique and expression. He used the photographic print as a basic drawing of his composition, on which he meticulously applied the layer of colours. His abstract forms seem to be shimmering in surface of his picture space, which transforms his abstract compositions to a metaphysical experience. “Being a sculptor, the application of the paint and the plastic construct that emerges out of the paint and the plastic construct that emerges out of it is no less than a sculptural experience for him.”\(^{56}\) (Fig.5.56)
Santana Gohain had trained as a print-maker at M.S.University, but later she moves towards her experiments in paintings. She had developed a unique style of non-objective painting. In her mixed-media works, she had worked in large panels with the layers of chalk, graphite and paper, which gives tactile quality to her canvases.

She was familiar with the surface and the material, as she was trained as a graphic artist, which allows her to work with various graphic materials. She usually creates the heavy layer of texture with the use of graphite paste on the surface of her composition. In Santana’s compositions “The surfaces are heavily ‘worked’ rather than ‘painted’….her prime concern is with the surface. Her ‘Image’, as it were, cannot be seen as an illusion in the work; it is the whole work itself, in its entirety. She sees the interior of the painting as an active space where things happen through a language of ambiguity rather than imposition. Although divisions, rectangles and other shapes are perceived within composition, their relationships are not defined with certainty and because of their variable reflective capacities, spatial relationships are inconstant.” 

(Fig.5.58, 5.59)

Fig.5.58. Untitled, Santana Gohain, 2004.                             Fig.5.59. Untitled, Santana Gohain, 2005

Within the current art situation in Baroda, there is no major tendency that dominates the art scene. But some young artists, still doing their experiments within the trajectories of abstraction.
5.3. Neo-Tantra Art and developments of Abstract Painting in Modern Indian Art.

Neo-Tantra art was the significant Indigenous art movement in the post-Independence Indian art. “Neo-Tantra is less an organized movement than a conglomeration of artists whom critics and art historians see as addressing concepts related to the renewed interest in Buddhist and Hindu Tantric practices during the 1960s and 1970s.” Neo-Tantra art is umbrella term developed in the 70’s to accumulate all the works of artists, which had a close affinity with the age-old philosophy of Tantra art. “Modern Indian Tantric painting may be considered as a mode of abstract art – as a kind of post-Abstract abstraction – since some of its practitioners began as Abstract painters and their present Tantric phase constituting only a further development in their work.”

During the 1960s, most of the artists, who were trained at various European centers and America, were working with the notion of Western modernism. Most of the artist turned towards the colour field abstractions and action based paintings. The figurative narratives, which dominated the art scene of the first half of the twentieth century, came to the edge. The artists had begun to look beyond the narrative, which could transcend their material world in to abstract or metaphysical experience. “Modern Indian Tantric painting can, thus be construed as Abstraction conceptually derived from the Tantric thought, as a striving to translate it in visual images or may not be derived from symbolism of ritual Yantra-Mandala and their geometric configurations or it may be regarded as a kind of symbolic abstraction inspired by the latter in its visual aspect.”

The philosophy of Tantra provides a new identity to Indian abstract art. Most of the artists work with the geometrical compositions. These geometrical forms are neither mere the adoption of the Tantric symbols nor mere the elements of graphic design. “Although the geometrical configurations, in the works of these artists, are closely linked with Tantric traditions, they do not serve any specific magical functions that were normally assigned to Yantras on the Tantric systems. The forms of their art are the images of their consciousness to the deepest layer of being.”

Historian have noted that it was the publication of Ajit Mookerjee’s seminal work ‘Tantra Art: its Philosophy & Physics’ that generated the interest in Tantric art...
amongst art enthusiasts in general and Indian artists in particular. But it is important to note that Ajit Mookerjee’s book comes in 1967, while some Indian artists already had started working with the ancient philosophy of Tantra. K.C.S Panikar had developed his indigenous style with his ‘Words and Symbols’ series; Biren De comes with his series of abstract works named ‘Divine Urge’; G.R.Santosh had developed his style based on the Kashmir Shaiva philosophy and Tantra; J.Swaminathan comes with his series ‘Color Geometry of Space’ before the publication of the Ajit Mookerjee’s book.

Many significant artists turned towards the indigenous philosophy of Tantra art for their inspiration. Among them K.C.S.Panikar, Biren De, G.R.Santosh, Sohan Qadri, S.B.Palsikar, Mahirwan Mamtani, K.V.Haridasan, V.Viswanadhan, J.Swaminathan, S.H.Raza, Om Prakash Sharma and Prafulla Mohanti are really significant in the context of abstraction.

Biren De was the major exponent of the ‘Neo-Tantra’ trend of modern Indian art. Biren De used abstract art as an approach of reflection of a deeper understanding of the nature and the philosophy of Tantra. He was born in a village of Faridpur (Now in Bangladesh) in 1926. He had pursued his formal education in art at the Government College of Arts and Crafts in Kolkata, from where he obtained his diploma in 1949. In 1952, he was appointed as a teacher at the Delhi Polytechnic in New Delhi and settled there. In his early period he was more a figurative painter, but later, due to his interest in age-old philosophy and the imagery of ‘Tantra’, he turned towards an abstract style of painting.
His interest in the tantric philosophy emerges during his visits to the various religious places throughout the India, which helps him further to develop the iconography of his style. “During his visits to different centers of pilgrimage in India, he would came across sadhus, mendicants, yogis, tantrikas, Vaishnavites, Shaivites, Jain and Buddhist monks and the monks of Radhakrishna Order; many of whom became his friends and would talk to him about their quest.”62 His encounter with varied tantric ritualistic imagery inspired him to work with non-figurative imagery in his compositions.

In 1959, he went to New York on Fulbright scholarship. His experience at New York provides him a new sensibility towards art and individual expressions. Around this time he had started to work on the theme of union of ‘Purusha’ and ‘Prakriti’, which in itself associated with the philosophy of ‘Tantra’. Usually he created mandalas, vaginas and phallus that represent Hindu and Tantric emblematic demonstration of the universal energies of female and male. In his compositions “…two major signs: one curved U-like, representing the female principle (Prakriti) and the other straight and wedge like representing the male principle (Purusha). In short, these were his graphic symbols of yoni and linga. Subsequently, these two lost their ‘separateness’ to form the matrix, the garbha-griha within his psyche, opening up to the light yonder which he had been intuing and at times perceiving in his trance-like states.”63 When he came back to India in 1961, he had exhibited a series of works entitled ‘Divine Urge’, which was really a significant series of works in the development of neo-tantric trend in the modern Indian art.
Tantric elements are very clearly visible in his artworks. He never used tantric imagery directly in his paintings, because most of tantric imagery like yantra or mandala and other symbols are the part of tantric rituals, performed by tantric. He intuitively developed his own style of painting inspired by the philosophy of Tantra. As he said “…the essential objective of tantra is the discovery of true nature of things, of self-realization and identification of oneself with nature wholly.” His paintings paved way for creating a new method of inventive expression. His artworks of proportioned and dim patterns were accompanied by gleaming effect. (Fig.5.61 to 5.63)

Biren De’s paintings are characterizes by the energy. Most of his compositions depicted the emanation of the gleaming light from centrifugal energy source. (Fig.5.60 to 5.65) As he said “I am concerned with energy, the energy of mountains, of nature in all her myriad manifestations, it is this energy that activates life.” In his works light is the symbol of the energy as much so that the two cannot be separated. The energy that manifests itself on his compositions is full of vitality. “I conceive light as the nucleus, the matrix. It spreads shoots and radiates, but you came back to the core, to the pivot invariably.”

Biren De’s colours are full of vibration and energy. His pictorial elements are mostly the geometrical forms such as a circle, bindu or point, U like form, oval shape etc. Biren usually repeated his formal structure of his compositions with
varied colours and tonalities. “Biren De’s paintings colours vibrate and interact, though confined to geometric boundaries – phenomenon on which much research has been carried out by the American painter, Joseph Albers.”

Biren De’s abstract paintings prove that he was amongst the innovators of tantric trend of modern art in India. “Since tantra-consciousness in Biren was not the result of merely an intellectual inquiry into its philosophy, his works do not turn out as colour illustrations one of these canvases is like a living entity, vibrating by virtue of its own inherent energy. In his work one sees less and less use of commonly known tantric imagery and more depiction of intrinsically experienced ‘visions’ that are charged with elevating, transcendental quality.” Through the abstract forms and colours, his intention was to discover the cosmos in his paintings.

Gulam Rasool Santosh was another significant artist of Neo-Tantra trend of modern Indian art in late sixties. He was born in 1929 at Srinagar, in a lower middle class family. At very young age he had established himself as a poet in the region of Kashmir. In his early age, he did many odd jobs to serve his financial conditions. In the early 1950s he had joined the Progressive Artists Association, Kashmir and started his journey as a painter. In 1953, he came to Baroda on the government scholarship to study painting under the guidance of N.S.Bendre. In Baroda, Santosh had learned almost all the techniques in span of two years tenure of his scholarship. In his formative years at Baroda he had started his experiments with landscapes influenced from the geometrical distortion of the cubism. In the early sixties, he gradually turned towards abstraction and started to compose abstract landscapes also He had created a extraneous texture in his compositions by the use of sand and colour in impasto method of palette-knife.

In the 1964, his visit to the Amar Nath cave proved a turning point in his life. He gave up the painting for certain period of time and delves deep into the study of Tantra and Kashmiri Shaivism. In this time, he was in his quest for spiritual or metaphysical content in his paintings. As he said “After much effort and reflection I found that all our problems, whether we look at them individually or collectively, are basically materialistic. Therefore, again and again, I came to the conclusion that the only answer would have to be of a spiritual nature. I think I can and I ought to do this even as a painter.”
Later, inspired by the Tantra philosophy, he had developed a new style of abstract painting. He made the blend of male form with that of female which merges in his geometric compositions that were deeply inspired by the concept of Shiv-Shakti union. (Fig.5.66) As he said “Finally it was the tantra which gave me the image. Particularly the tantra of the left-hand practice, the *Pancha-Makaraa*: madya, mamsa, mattsya, mudra and maithuna. These five aims are there, and it was *maithuna* which gives the image”\(^70\)

As well as formal structure of his paintings is concerned is almost created by the geometrical forms. It is important to note that through the use of geometry, he transforms the figural form in to a pure geometric structure, which constructs the abstract form in his compositions. (Fig.5.68, 5.69) “The Purusha-Prakriti union is suggested by reducing the two into elemental forms as far as possible. But what is especially to be noted is the quality of equilibrium, which is not static in spite of symmetrically laid out shapes, but of the kind which one may compare with the state of equilibrium achieved in the highest stage of contemplation.”\(^71\)

Santosh’s precisely used the geometrical elements in his composition such as circle, square, point, line, triangle, pentagon, hexangle, which is related with the number related geometry of Kashmir Shaivate philosophy. (Fig.5.70, 5.71) Suggestions of the elemental aspects like fire, water, air, earth and ether started
playing hide and seek in the constructive design of geometrical forms. “Although the geometrical configurations, in his paintings, are closely linked with the Tantric tradition, they do not serve any specific magical functions that were normally assigned to yantras in the Tantric systems. The form of his art the form of his consciousness to the deepest layers of his being…Santosh presents a coherent world in vital images of his heightened awareness. The geometrical forms are like graphs of laws and energies that act equally on the sensible and super-sensible levels. His morphology of geometrical figures assumes symbolic significance, sometime pure and sometime qualifying.”72

Fig. 5.68. Untitled, G.R. Santosh, 1987.

Fig. 5.69. Untitled (Tantra Series), G.R. Santosh, 1987

Fig. 5.70. Untitled, G.R. Santosh, 1996.

Fig. 5.71. Shiva Shakti, G.R. Santosh
Santosh generally uses a trident to emphasize his tantric or Shaivite symbol. As he said “I uses it quite deliberately as a Shaivite symbol and owes it to the Trika philosophy of Kashmir which I am becoming familiar.” He used the wide range of the colours in his compositions, which is quite Indian and the feeling of the paintings was purely oriental. Colours in his compositions are almost symbolic such as black colour to symbolise the darkness and yellow is the colour of light or knowledge. Forms emerge on his canvases naturally from the unconscious mind. “Kashmir Shaiva philosophy distinguishes between yantra- the visual, geometric state and mantra – signs or symbols. It is up to sadhaka (mediator) to merge the two creatively. Santosh created his own mantra and his own yantra in his poetry and other writings as well as in his art, drawing upon the same matrix.”

Mahirwam Mamtani is one of the major exponents of the Neo-Tantra art movement during the seventies. He was born at Bhiria in Sindh (Now in Pakistan) in 1935. After the partition of India in 1947, he migrated to New Delhi with his family. Mamtani had a strong interest in painting from his early childhood, but after migration to New Delhi, he had a really tough life there. In his adolescence, he has to do some odd jobs to earn money to serve his family. But, besides his job work, he had completed his graduation. After his graduation, he had joined the evening classes at the Fine Arts Department of Delhi Polytechnic to study painting.
When Mahirwan Mamtani entered in the field of art as a student at Fine Arts Department of Delhi Polytechnic under the guidance of B.C. Sanyal during the 1960s, Indian art scene was going through a period of chaos. Modernism had already become a very strong presence and was the guiding force and language for many of the artists. In his formative years, he was highly influence by the paintings of Kandinsky.

In 1966, he was awarded a scholarship by DAAD, German Academic Exchange Service to study at the Academy of Visual Arts in Munich. In Munich, he was influenced by constructivist experiments with the form but these experiments were very alien to Mamtani. So he turned towards the age-old Indian philosophy of Tantra. Later, he had developed his own vocabulary of abstract composition inspired by the ‘Tantric’ philosophy and by the use of geometric forms. Around late sixties he made a series of works entitle ‘Centovision’ (Fig.5.72, 5.73), which become the hallmark of his style. His paintings of Centrovision and are meant to serve a medium toward reaching self-knowledge. By looking at them one can reach the first step in a transcendental vision of the universe. “The inspiration for Mahirwan Mamtani's conception of “Centrovision” is derived from the manifestation of tantric doctrines. Emanating from the centre toward the outside, his forms are akin to the Mandala concept, the visual manifestation of which are based on the axiom of microcosm versus macrocosm. The feeling of procreation is evoked by the rhythmical arrangement of symmetrical, curvilinear organic forms, the roots of which could be traced in the form of the female, the symbol of Shakti, the supreme cosmic energy. Instead of having a flux of light, the paintings are permeated with the whispering tonal values achieved through the integration of colour hues with soft light which becomes the essential ingredient for the modulation of pulsating circular forms.”75
Mamtani made himself better known as Neo-Tantric artist, with an inclination to express himself through typical signs and symbols, his compositions are often full of geometric space divisions as well as ‘Mandalas’ and so on. (Fig.5.74, 5.75) His works are very easy to discern because of frequent use of bright colours that characterized them. Later in the 1990s, he had execute a series of work entitled ‘Cosmic Geometry’ (Fig.5.76, 5.77), which is further extension of his tantric geometrical forms on the wood surface divided into various forms. His ‘Centrovision’ are rich constructs of superimposed geometric forms, expressive colors and tones, recognizing the relationship of the center to the circumference.

Sohan Qadri was also an important artist whose works was deeply associated with the Neo-Tantric trend. His paintings are the outcome his states of deep meditation and the philosophy of tantra. He was born in 1932 at the village Chachoki in Phagwara, Punjab. At very early age of his life, he was initiated into yogic practice by the Guru Bhikam Giri, a Bengali Tantric-Vajrayan yogi and a Sufi Ahmed Ali Shah Qadri. He also went to Himalaya and Tibet staying at various Buddhist monasteries for his quest for the spiritual. He had completed his formal education in art at Government College of Art in Shimla.

In the 1960s, when he started his artistic journey, He usually painted the abstract landscapes with the use of heavy impasto on the canvas board. But, later in the late 60s, his early initiation and interest in Tantric philosophy emerges in his paintings. This was also a time when many artists in India had already started to work with the age-old philosophy and imagery of Tantra. At the same time he also
developed his own vocabulary based on the tantric symbology. But till the early seventy, his paintings are dominated by the heavy oil impasto on the almost single coloured backgrounds of his compositions. (Fig. 5.78, 5.79)

Later, in mid-nineteen seventies, he had started working with vegetable dyes on the paper, by which he developed a unique style of abstract painting. Qadri begins his process by bathing paper in acid-free water and once it is swollen with liquid, he rhythmically scores the surface and applies inks and dyes. He uses a thick intaglio paper, which he carves in stages to achieve a sculptural effect. Most of his paintings are stubbed with the blade or precious stone. This raise the surface of the paper and gives his works a three dimensional effect. The repetition of these careful incisions is an integral part of his meditation. His colours appear to vibrate with varied tonal effects and their psychological effect based on the principles of an aesthetic of moods or rasas. “Space for Sohan Qadri is endless. The vibrations are continuous. If they assume rhythmic expression in colour energies, then they are symbolic of the other vibrations in other spaces, outside the canvas. The microcosm reflects the dialectic of struggle in macrocosm.”

The essence of his paintings is energy or Shakti, which moves. He transformed the Tantric symbolism into his own abstract language using large areas of colour planes, capturing the oriental essence. “In fact, from the realms of symbolism, his art progressively attains the realm of pure art; waves of creative energy centered on one focal point. These form serene images with the deeper bases of dark tones, sometimes relieved by the lighter coloured etchings. His works can be
perceived from different angles; as a purely oriental, deep and symbolic form and
colour to accompany thought in search for deeper insight; a structural exposition not
requiring any particular connotation or equally valid, as an aesthetically pleasing
experience.” The decision to settle down in Copenhagen had made a lot of
difference in Sohan’s perception. His works on paper became more and more
refined. Collapsing the figures into the minimal forms, he naturally arrived at the use
of geometric forms and shapes. (Fig.5.80, 5.81)

Fig.5.80. Inward Journey, Sohan Qadri
Fig.5.81. Purusha, Sohan Qadri, 1999

His creative experiments that spread across almost four decades have refined
the visual linguistic of the Sohan Qadri considerably. A closer look at Sohan’s
works revels that they are geometrical constructions, rather than ‘formless’
abstraction. He was one of the most original painters of his generation, whose works
can easily associate to the Tantric ritualistic elements such as ‘Pranayam’ (Fig.5.82)
and Trikaya (Fig.5.83). His paintings have something more than mere formal
properties. “Unless we eye these works merely simplistically – as mere lines,
colours, and geometry – we will need in them a higher aspiration – that coming to
terms with the ground of one being. Only so do they give of their true worth””78 His
works evoke the sense of awakening consciousness.
J.Swaminathan had painted his ‘Colour Geometry of Space’ series (Fig.5.84) in the mid-nineteen sixties, in which he also incorporated with varied tantric elements. He introduced some mystical signs in his paintings such as the snake, the sperm, the lotus and the sign of OM, which makes his paintings a metaphysical experience or a meditative space. He had painted tantric symbols in his paintings but that was not mere idea of imitation because these symbols never fulfilled any purpose. He adopted these symbols from the age-old philosophy of tantra for pictorial purposes. “The painting aimed, and in some cases arrived, beyond the purely pictorial: the picture plane became an environment, a space for meditation. Here he aligned himself with the Tantra art, not historically or religiously but pictorially...But Swaminathan feels that, in so far as the Western artist permits himself to arrive at a visual expression of abstract metaphysics, he is employing a self-limiting method. He is deducing abstraction rather than beginning with it through an intuitive understanding of means. Because of the intrinsic faith of the Tantra artist in the potency of the line, form, colour, and space, it is the Tantra that involves him more, and takes him much farther towards his own expression.”

![Fig.5.82. Pranayama, Sohan Qadri, 2002.](image1)
![Fig.5.83. Trikaya 1, Sohan Qadri, 2005](image2)

![Fig.5.84. The Double Sign, J.Swaminathan, 1965.](image3)
![Fig.5.85. Symbols Becomes Signs, J.Swaminathan, 1987](image4)

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Om Prakash is also a significant painter in the context of Neo-Tantra art. Om Prakash’s interest in metaphysical thoughts of tantric philosophy led him to the style of abstract images. He deeply researched the various aspects about the ancient Hindu philosophy of tantra, which push him to the world of geometric realm. As he said “Whatever our understanding of the Tantric thought based on recent important research, it can at best be of an indirect kind in the present context. More than this, it was the Tantric philosophy of self-realisation and the magnificent concept discipline in everything and on the highest plane which could influence and inspire me.”

Geometrical forms provide a sense of purity to his thoughts. As he said “I try to block out all that is distracting: problems, emotions, events. My paintings are mostly devoid of many recognizable forms or objects. There is a kind of purity possible through geometry and possibility of weaving a magic web of mysticism.”

His research in ancient Hindu mysticism and colour symbolism brings a new sensibility to his colours in his compositions. He used varied tonal gradation of colours in his geometric compositions, which had some symbolic meaning always attached to them. His painting ‘Madhyam’ (Fig.5.86), and Blooming ‘Glow’ (Fig.5.87) are significant in this context.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, he consistently worked on the theme of ‘Manadala’. “Beyond the visual level a manadala should lead to other spheres up to high abstraction It requires concentration and can only be experienced liturgically. Traditional Mandalas were for meditation; through them the monk could step by
step enter the palace leaving the world of forms behind.” He did not paint mandalas as meditational object or as mere a geometric design. His intension was to create a thoughtful object of contemplation. (Fig.5.88, 5.89)

Fig.5.88. Mandala Bhoomi, Om Prakash Sharma, 1990.  
Fig.5.89. Mandala, Morning Garden, O.P. Sharma, 1996

Fig.5.90. Words and Symbols, K.C.S. Paniker, 1968

K.C.S. Paniker’s paintings of ‘Words and Symbols’ series was really significant development in his artistic journey. Around 1963, he developed a new abstract vocabulary in his works of ‘Words and Symbols’ (Fig.5.90). Paniker was highly inspired from the mathematical tables of Indian horoscopes and handwritten Malyali tantric scriptures. Paniker had used the signs, symbols and the scripts in his compositions. He had painted his words and symbols, entirely in terms of words and symbols. His intention was to capture the visual effects for the mystical outcome rather than to be associated with specific meaning or message. In his compositions of ‘Words and Symbols’, Paniker had visualized the wide range of forms of life
coming together in a design of sublime and mystery. Though the term Neo-Tantra is associated with Panikar, but he did not adopted the visual codes of Tantra. He was more interested to create a his own style based on the indigenous sources.

In the 1970s S.H.Raza turned towards the philosophy of Tantra and discover the ‘Bindu’ as thoughtful object of contemplation from his early childhood lesson. His focus turned to pure geometrical forms; his images were improvisations on an essential theme: that of the mapping out of a metaphorical space in the mind. “For Raza, the evolution towards geometry that had started with Cezanne continued with the Bindu, a figure able to contain every geometric shape as all of them can be drawn within its circle.”

Raza perceives the Bindu as the center of creation and existence progressing towards forms and color as well as energy, sound, space and time. As he says “The Bindu awakened a latent energy inside me” His paintings certainly related to the Hindu concept or tantric concept of bindu or energy, cosmic or universal. He studied tantric philosophy, and certainly taken this idea from various sources perhaps also his own living experience.

Raza was highly inspired from the Jain and Rajput miniature paintings and Tantric diagrams. Through his regular reading and research Raza develops a deep understanding for Hindu philosophy and Tantric rituals and had assimilated various
concepts in his experiments. He transforms these concepts further in his paintings with the framework of his imagination and intellect. He repeatedly works with some concepts such as Bindu (Dot) (Fig. 5.91), Purusha-Prakriti, Pancha Chakra (Five Chakras) (Fig. 5.92), Bija (Seed), Kudilini (Latent Energy) and Shunya (Void).

K.V. Haridasan creates his own language of metaphors both in geometric and biomorphic forms, which constitutes his mystical abstract compositions. His ideas of myth and symbols came to his paintings through his own experience to tantric philosophy. He had used various tantric symbolic motifs of sun, moon, lotus petals, star and oval shape in his compositions (Fig. 5.93). All these forms, which he used in his compositions, he derived from the nature. Another important aspect about his paintings is the decorative structure of his compositions, which was largely based on the symmetrical arrangement of geometrical forms and textural surface of his canvases.

Fig. 5.93. Brahmasutra, K.V. Haridasan, 1989

Prafulla Mohanti was born in 1936 in a small village Nanpur at Orissa. He had studied architecture at J.J. School of Art, where he received his diploma in 1960. Further he went to London to study town planning at Leeds College of Arts on scholarship, which proved to be the turning point in his life. At Leeds College he had started making painting and did his first exhibition there in 1964. After obtaining a diploma in town planning, Prafulla Mohanti worked as an architect
planner with a greater London Council for several years. Later he gave up his career in architecture and turned towards painting.

Prafulla Mohanti is one of the significant artists, whose works are closely associated with the Neo-Tantra trend of the late 1960s. Mohanti’s works are abstract in character, reflecting the deeper understanding of the nature and its core substance atom. His paintings largely comprise bright concentric circles in red, yellow and blue, in which he conceptualize the ‘bindu’ as atom and ‘manadala’ as universe. The idea of his work is the expansion of the dot, the beginning and spreading out. (Fig. 5.94. 5.95) His abstract composition “…has very little to do with ritualistic Yantra-Mandalas and their geometric configurations. Prafulla Mohanti at best could be considered at best could be considered as a great symbolist and colour visionary.”

His compositions became more and more refined. Irrespective of the medium, he experimented with colours and formal rhythms. He naturally arrived at the field of geometric forms such as dot and circles and oval shape in his compositions. His invocation to primordial elements has led to the visual of metaphysical experience. His abstract canvases express a state of consciousness.

Neo-Tantra artists make a great contribution to the development of Modern Indian art. Most of the artists associated with the philosophy of Tantra had created their own styles of abstract art, which presents a vibrant picture of our own indigenous expression in contemporary art.
5.4. Development of Abstract Painting in Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh is a land of multiple cultures raging from tribal to tradition to music and dance forms and many more. The pre-historic caves of Bhimbetka, Hinglajgarh, and Jogimara are the living examples of aesthetic experiences of our ancestors. In those caves one can easily find the earliest traces of human life which depicts the transition and growth of human in much simplified forms. Made thousands of years ago, these rock paintings still bear the testimony of man's innate sense of art.

Madhya Pradesh is one of the major centers for folk and tribal art from the various tribal communities including Bhil, Gond, Agaria, Kol, Pardhan (to name a few). Due to this diverse tribal population, Madhya Pradesh has acquired a unique identity in art and culture, specially tribal paintings of Madhya Pradesh are distinguished for their artistic exhilaration, their charm and elegance, their wisdom and knowledge. They show a wide range of responses to vital elements of tribal life and their existence. Their religious devotion, myths, legends, rituals are activated into their art. These artistic expressions are clearly exemplified in Pithora and Mandana wall and floor paintings. These wall and floor decorations are made of simplified design motifs and patterns. For various tribal communities this is not merely an art form but in larger extent it is a part of the rituals of the tribe.

While tribal art is protecting its identity in articulating the collective sensibilities, with the passage of time new manifestations also started coming to the fore. Man in the urban world developed the tendency of breaking himself free from his identity in conformity with the pre-existing traditional ties and relates himself with a wider world, but in the process of transition he might be lost. This awareness of losing his individual existence leads him to embark on the journey of re-discovering his own self to articulate his individual sensibilities strongly. This awareness led to the emergence and evolution of contemporary trends in India. Madhya Pradesh is not untouched by these new tendencies.

Thus the Madhya Pradesh artists, there is in threefold with which he has to grapple. Being a part of rich and long tradition, he has to reconcile himself with the changing trends and new methods of achieving novel aesthetic effects and
configurations, while at the same time asserting his own individuality, his own emotional and psychological responses to his immediate experiences.

The visual art has been strong at the traditional level while modern art is striving for a place in cultural space. In 1927, D.D. Devlalikar founded the Indore School of Art (Devlalikar Arts Centre) and is considered as the pioneer of modern art movement in Madhya Pradesh, a new trend emerged and artists began to reflect new aspirations. From Indore the modern art movement then spread in Gwalior and Jabalpur also. Besides Devlalikar, others who have given important contribution in further reviving the movement and generating an environment conducive to progressive trends in art are Vishnu Chinchalkar and N.S. Bendre.

Vishnu Chinchalkar received his art-training in traditionally recognized manner first at Devlalikar Arts Centre, Indore and later in J.J. School of Art, Bombay; and after completing the academic training, he worked for a considerable number of years on the same out-of-date lines with landscape and portraiture painting. Around 1949 Vishnu has been started working with the new zeal. “He has a close kinship with Friday Group of Artists, which has been a symbol of guiding spirit for him for all these years.” Vishnu go beyond the domain of paints and brush as he started experiment with the variety of material from nature and a lot of things lying waste in the house, take a new form in the hands of Vishnu, and in turn they become the creations of ever enduring charm and beauty. “His range of materials spread beyond driftwood and twigs to all things organic, natural or man-
made which included from plywood to algae growing in stagnant water, cobwebs and damp spots appearing on walls in wet weather. Vishnu saw lively form where others viewed those objects as inanimate and waste. Even froth caused by disinfectant on floor beckoned him, and he took its impression on paper. His constant quest for form inspires him to delve deeper in the nature and experiment with newer forms. Although he was not abstract painter but some of his compositions are very much abstract in its own nature.

With the sole efforts of M.S. Bhand, Gwalior also became one of the art training centers in Madhya Pradesh after Indore. During this time Ujjain was also becoming an important place for art activities, particularly with the establishment of Kalavrat Nyas and Kalidas Academy. Now art camps and exhibitions were held on the regular basis, in which artists from all over India come to participate. Art unfolds and the artists are approaching new avenues to interact. (Fig.5.96, Fig.5.97)

In the year 1947, Progressive group was formed with the artist like S.H. Raza, were also raised in and emerged from the soil of Madhya Pradesh. Raza’s work is a kind of journey through memory lanes where the visible diffuses into a gestural play of colours. His brightly lit compositions of his formative years gradually come from memories of the childhood days spent in the forests of Madhya Pradesh. After 1980’s, Raza unveils the works of many younger artists not only in the Madhya Pradesh but also in varied parts of the nation to encourage the abstraction as a movement. Other outstanding artists of this time are L.S. Rajput, Madan Bhatnagar, S.K. Das, and Hari Bhatnagar. Later Suresh Choudhary and Sachida Nagdev came in the lineage, whose contribution in the abstraction in modern art is also remarkable.

Recognizing the need to create a culture quintessential for creative art activities, Madhya Pradesh government established Kala Parishad in Bhopal, in the year 1952. Under the strong influence of international modernism, traditional cultural principles and current socio-political realities had both been swept aside, and did not find adequate representation in the work of the first generation modernists. As the next generation of artists was maturing in the 1960’s and 70’s there was renewed interest in all forms of indigenous and folk art forms.
Bharat Bhawan was established in 1982 in Bhopal, designed by Charles Correa, inaugurated by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and sponsored entirely by the Madhya Pradesh government. The organization provided a space for contemporary expression for the first time in India. With the inception of Bharat Bhawan, it became a hub of all sorts of art & literary activities. “It is a multi art centre set up to create an interactive proximity between the verbal, visual and performing arts.” J. Swaminathan was persuaded by the state government to set up the gallery and museum in the Bharat Bhawan. While he was working on Roopankar Museum of Fine Arts, he has a very distinct idea for the making of the museum as he write “I had conceived of the museum as a composite museum of urban, folk and the tribal art. While the notion of modernism may exclude the folk and the tribal, contemporaniety seen as the simultaneous validity of coexisting cultures may be all inclusive, especially in India where we have such strong and living tradition of folk and tribal cultures.”

In order to make a unique collection for the museum, he made a plan to collect the treasure of folk and tribal art objects from the region. Swaminathan called a group of students and artists from the surrounding region including Gwalior, Jabalpur, Indore and Dhar. He organized a short term orientation course for them in order to give some basic knowledge about folk and tribal culture. He then divided the students in six teams and sent them to the rural and tribal areas of the state. He himself travelled around some twenty thousand kilometers in jeep covering a wide area to collect the varied tribal art objects. Swaminathan also collect a large number of paintings of contemporary artists like Husian, Ram Kumar, Manjit Bawa and many more. It was the Swaminathan’s vision that the Roopankar Museum had a unique collection of tribal art objects as well as modern art. As Ashok Vajpeyi said “I would be so emboldened to claim that largely because of Swaminathan (not entirely, because others also contributed), a truly post-modern institution emerged in Bharat Bhawan in which all aspects of culture flowed together again.” Swaminathan stayed in Bhopal for almost a decade, and was constantly in close touch with the urban and folk-tribal artists of the region. With the hard work and dedication of the Swaminathan, Bharat Bhawan became a major centre of visual art in India.
During his stay at Bhopal brought strong affinities with tribal culture of the region which made a long lasting impression on his painting as he wrote “Madhya Pradesh brought about a basic shift in my painting again the life and vibrant contact with tribal cultures triggered off my natural bent for the primeval”. In his painting ‘Symbols becomes Sign’ (Fig.5.98) he created a language of signs by depicting some words and geometric forms inspired from the tribal mud wall paintings. He creates a unique language of tribal motifs in the picture space. During these years he creates number of small drawings and water colours which clearly show the impact of tribal art on his painting practice.

It was due to J.Swaminathan’s effort that the Madhya Pradesh art scene came into prominence. A large number of young artists from different parts of Madhya Pradesh started coming Bharat Bhawan to find a platform for their art activities. Swaminathan inspired a generation of artists. A new crop of young artist emerges in the 1980s in Madhya Pradesh such as Yusuf, Akhilesh, Seema Ghuraiya and Harchandan Singh Bhatti. All these artists create their own individual style in painting stemming under his influence.
Among this generation of artists, Yusuf is one of the significant names. Yusuf was trained both in painting and sculpture at Gwalior in 70’s. He moved to Bhopal when J. Swaminathan asked him to join Bharat Bhawan. He had played a significant role in the development of the graphic studio at Bharat Bhawan.

His painting is densely populated with rich visual rendering of rhythmic lines. There is certain kind of mystery in his composition which lies in the procreative force of his lines. He creates a linear language of concrete forms in his compositions as he wrote “My paintings are musical notation of music yet unborn.”\(^{93}\) Regarding his preoccupation with lines as a primary element in his art practice, Yusuf reveals, “Everything in this universe while taking birth is micro, when it evolves further, it becomes macro.”\(^{94}\) His approach is the same. His line takes birth from a dot which when propagates, stretches into infinity. He believes line as the most abstract and linear element which others might use till the point from where it converts into an object or form. While his lines remain ending all the other possibilities, capable of being taken anywhere or drawn in any direction. (Fig.5.99, 5.100)

Yusuf often paints in black and white or otherwise almost in monochromatic manner. Line is an important element in his painting and like his lines; his space is also linear, generated between the two lines. Lines create an integral relation with
the space that does not change, as he believes that space is a phenomenal reality and
the relation between things keeps changing while space itself does not change. Space
has 'extra-mental' reality however it is our sensibility that we experience things in
space. Like his lines, his forms are the living units of his drawings. His concrete
forms evoke a sense of liberation from the confinements of the external world.

Colours emerge in his paintings so gradually, that it seems to be a part of a
natural process. His fine strokes with very subtle use of colours enhance the visual
sensitivity of his works. Sometimes, Yusuf paints in the bright colours, but his
colours have placidity in the picture space. Colours make their own space, never
disturb his drawing. He believes that colours do come from within. His
comprehensive understanding of colours, forms and lines gives his art a living
quality; both emotive and sensitive.

Suresh Choudhary is also a significant artist in the context of modern art
movement in the Madhya Pradesh. He was one of the artists who belong to the first
generation of artist who turned towards abstraction as a medium of his expression.
Born in 1943 at Indore he studied art at Indore School of Art. During his formative
years Mr. D. J. Joshi and Vishnu Chinchalkar had great influences on him.
Throughout his life he works in various styles and mediums but often he paints
abstract landscapes in almost monochromatic colours. He created a certain kind of
mysterious atmosphere, a moment of serenity and stillness in his abstract landscapes.
Texture is also an important element in his painting, which he created through
various techniques. (F.5.101)
Another significant name in abstract art emerged from Madhya Pradesh is Akhilesh. He completed his formal education at Indore Art College in 1976. During his formative years he was influenced from Malwa miniatures, which had shaped his aesthetic sensibilities. Later, he came to Bhopal and started working at Bharat Bhawan. Under the guiding light of Swaminathan, he transformed his thinking towards arts and life as a being artist. He turned towards abstraction as a medium of his expression. He acknowledged Swaminathan and Raza as his mentors and at the same time he had an abiding passion for Malwa miniatures. Akhilesh has deep sense of belonging to his roots but at the same time he also feel, connected to the painters like Picasso, Klee and Kandinsky. His ideas of abstraction in his formative years, gathering further clarity as the years progressed.

Fig.5.102. Has it something to do with Benaras, Akhilesh, . 1998

Colours are the most important part of his painting. He always finds a certain obsession with colours. He uses colours with a degree of highest accomplishment, has a rare proficiency in creating tonality of colours within colours. As he wrote “My work as usual are the game hide and seek. This never-ending game I play with colours, forms and lines. The warmth of the colours is the core of my experience”\textsuperscript{95}

His forms as multiple patterns are modulated into a meshwork of images that re-enforces his poetic faith. His imagery of sensation has no culmination point where
shapes get multiplied with a regenerating force and united into one complete whole. His pictorial vocabulary appeals to a mind that always aspires for perfection.

Fig. 5.103. Untitled Red Scriptit, Akhilesh, 2005

He believes it is difficult to define abstract, rather any art as even in non-abstract art we can see abstract elements capable of invoking emotions in us. Like music it does not need any inspiration, has the most abstract language and can create a deep effect upon the listeners. His act of painting is not born out of any inspiration, it comes from within. For him it is like being with the self. He believes that his painterly idiom is founded on the principle of absence. Akhilesh painted his series of paintings ‘Has it something to do with Benaras?, (Fig. 5.102) without ever visiting the city of Benaras. “In absentia, the abstraction of reality is a world where the humdrum of everyday existence recedes, leaving a cosmos uninhabited and purely aesthetic.”96 In his abstractions there are allusions of the cave paintings of Bhimbetka, musical notations, and alphabets of unknown scripts, which create his own visual language.

Seema Ghurayya belongs to Gwalior, now living and working in Bhopal. She had completed her post graduation in painting from Jiwaji University, Gwalior. She was also awarded with the Bharat Bhavan scholarship. In her formative years she was highly influenced from the rock paintings of Bhimbetka Caves, nearside the
Seema, who works chiefly in monochromes with her impressionistic strokes of paint-roller. Her chromatic vision gives credence to a search, which traverses through many obscure layers of thick colours. She never makes reference on her canvases to anything having a natural appearance. She develops her style of minimalist painting which has a unique sophistication and rusticity.

Fig.5.104. Untitled, Seema Ghurayya, 2003

Her minimal use of colours is remarkably unique, not only as it reveals their subtlety but underlying it is an emotive force. She refrains herself from using bright or vibrant colours. She only paints in light tones of grey, blue, yellow and white. She mixes the colours in various tonal gradations. Her abstract imagery might look obscure, but it also has strong visual appeal. From the very materiality of paints, brush and canvas; the artist releases the painting and completely abides to arouse its communicative side. She uses white color in her paintings in an ample manner, which is a very unique aspect about her technique. A very important aspect of her creations is the smoky translucent effect which produces a sense of clandestine. There is a great sense of abstraction in her plain visual language. (Fig.5.104)

In her poetry like paintings, there is evocation of the soul that affects the viewer profoundly. “Seema Ghurayya tends to handle a complex poetics of vastness and reluctance.” She constructs meanings for her abstract imagery and paints her canvas in multiple layers of muted colours that creates a rich texture on the surface underlying. The tonality of colours, half visible movement of geometrical forms and
repetition of the texture communicate her inner resonance in her painting. Without the arbitration of images, the artist has the ability to translate deep philosophical concepts into her paintings. She also use some unknown shapes and lines in her paintings which seems to emerge out of the thick and complex structure of her canvas and seems to float over and above hovering tentatively.

For Shridhar Iyer art is a journey, both introvert and ceaseless, journey of colours, lines, and forms it carries with it a magic, the joy of knowing the unknown. Shridhar born in the district of Thanjavur in 1961 he was brought up in Madhya Pradesh, and has for long made Bhopal his home. He joined the Bharat Bhawan as a gallery attendant where he entered in to the world of art. Taking inspiration from the Swaminathan he started his journey in art.

In his 'Jatra' (journey) series (Fig.5.105) in 2005, Shridhar unfolds and explores the unknown, the limitless. His journey dedicated to his journey of creative discovery. In this journey Iyer continues his quest of creating ethereal energy and harmony in open spaces with an integrity and individual style. He makes the bold strokes of colours with a ritualistic gesture. He also paints a unknown script which submerged into his strokes and create very rare kind of impression. “The artist's use of colour is also quite individualistic. Shridhar Iyer's extensive knowledge of tribal art allowed him to dispense with the rules of colour handed down by schools of
What he learned from the tribal art, the sense of abandon in his relationship with his palette.

In his abstract paintings he creates both organic and inorganic forms with the same kind of energy. For him art is beyond any physical, where even a tiniest object takes a gigantic form. Nothing ever remains the same, shapes keep changing, and so does the perception. The game of visibility and invisibility keeps going. In his paintings, there is a ceaseless motion generating immense energies in everything. His lines and forms are infused with same energy. “His central theme is the flow of energy through the Universe.”

His bold brush strokes also create the same whirling effect capable of creating multiple dimensions in his work. He usually paints in a bold palette of red, yellow, gold and green, all vibrant and fresh which creates a interest in the picture space.

Fig.5.106. Untitled, Yogendra Tripathi, 2000

Born in Khairagarh now living and working in Bhilai, Yogendra Tripathi seems to contemplate over the inevitable decaying nature of things. He offers visions of parched and moist earth, or a ground filled with an imminent light and rendering of some unknown marks, hinting that much more is to be unearthed. He attempts to
perceive the overtones of inorganic in organic. In his textures and colours we witness this disintegration and decay. “Art for him therefore is a closer understanding and personal interpretation of the spaces that he visualizes outwardly and inwardly.”

His colours are predominantly earthy; with textures they give certain rawness to his canvas. The varying tones of colours impart a somber and serene impression to his paintings. (Fig.5.106)

Sanju Jain's had developed a very style of painting based on the organic formation of abstracted forms. She does not depend on the ready-made material. Whether it is the use of medium, technique or colour, she believes in her own expression. Her technique is painstaking. She uses paper pulp, clay and gum Arabic to make a paste for giving textures on her canvas. In this way she prepares a new space for herself where creases, folds and crimps come naturally. These layers and folding create an illusion of depth. (Fig.5.107)

Like her textures, her use of colours is quite arresting and has a quality of persistence. The major attraction of her paintings are the colour which remind us of the Indian folk culture where colours are used in traditional rites and rituals like ‘Rangoli’ etc. Her virtuosity in handling varying colours and textures is quite captivating.
She was born in a village near the River Narmada, her childhood memories have all the hues of nature and her rural life. She has spent her childhood playing around the mud houses. Perhaps this was her first experience of texture, still flitting somewhere in her sub-conscious. Her exuberance in delineation of her experience is founded on her mastery over her medium, technique and her understanding of nature's aesthetics. Frequently, her style constrained to monochromes. Her artworks reflect contemplative and peaceful quality. Still, distinctive dynamism keeps on lingering at the surface.

Manish Pushkale, born in Bhopal, have no formal training in visual art but he found a powerful and sensitive initiation in to art at evocative environment of Bharat Bhawan. He started painting as a figurative painter, but soon he turned towards the abstraction as his medium of expression. Manish has evolved a language of abstraction which carries his own personal imprint. In his formative years, he had worked in Bhopal in the print medium he develops a technique of creating an image through erasure much like the processes involved in working with an etching plate. He creates a pattern of various kinds of forms with different degrees of translucency.

Manish has done an adroit research on Jain philosophy. He creates a series of abstract paintings entitled ‘Samayik’ (Fig.5.108) in 2002, In Jainism Samayik is linked to that of Japa or chanting. In Samayik, a single mantra manifests itself by repeated articulation. Repeated action, thus, unfolds the tremendous potentialities within the mantra. Taking inspiration from that theory, Manish creates the repetition of the form through his own autonomous colours and by doing this his intention is to manifest a kind of autonomous texture in his compositions.
Manish’s early training as geologist is visible in the organic texture in his compositions. He uses a technique of rubbing oil pigment into the surface of the canvas in a way that creates a highly textured surface. “Manish captures the inner spirit with his scrutinizing assertions that get built into the textural constraints that he wants to endow his works with. Details for Manish are created through the effects that he achieves on the surface of the intention. Geometric patterns vie with textural tonalities and what ensures is a mesh meandering that accrues to metaphysical wandering of the subliminal kind”101 (Fig. 5.109)

He never uses the brush to apply the colours on the canvas. The meticulous colours and his method to applying the colours in layers and wiping off the paint tangibly invoke a complexity in his works. Colours for Manish are either soft and tender, or strong and passionately riveting. When the colour brims on the verge of a sage green that echoes the insight of rumination, it settles into the matrix of multiple association and gradations.”102 His works are delightful play of formal dichotomies like light and shade, form and formlessness. “His paintings are not only construction of colours, they are simultaneously texts of light.”103

Fig. 5.110. Untitled, Anwar, 2001.
Anwar is also an important artist in the development of abstraction in the Madhya Pradesh. He was born in Ambha in 1964. He had completed his National Diploma in fine arts from Gwalior University. In his formative years he started painting with abstract expressionist note. In which his gesture is an important entity. His intention is to create a movement and surface tension in which there is passion to feel an ephemeral moment. As Swaminathan said “What Anwar paints is not the being but the state of its becoming. This state of becoming however is bereft of violence and clash. It is as if you are watching a waterfall, or a storm in the sea with the sound track cut off. The visual palpitation leads you to lend an attentive ear to the silent music of creation”.

Most of the paintings of Anwar titled as ‘untitled’ and it is also difficult to articulate what he beholds as his final search as an artist. His paintings carry a sense of probing deep within. It also contains a questioning of space and hold forth a fundamental argument with the series of transformation caused by overlapping structures within each frame. In the later period he started working with earth colours and dry pastel colours on the paper. Anwar deeply concentrated on the division of the space and the structure of the form in his abstract compositions. But the same time one can see the automatism in his act of creation of his forms, as he believes that act of creation is the path of uncertainties and filled with the element of surprise. He claims that “Art perform itself, it happens on its own, it generates itself, art is without the artist and not within….and I have no power to portray what is not destined to appear in my work.” His structure of composition consists of various literal, numerical and geometrical forms which are the part of his visual language. He follows a multifold process of making of his forms often filled with various techniques including tearing, sticking, pasting and scraping to create the desired texture in the picture space. (Fig.5.110)

Born in 1969, Anil Gaikwad left his Art education in between and left Indore for direct education from Life. His interest in art is to explore forms from different aspects of the worldly life. He plays with colours and textures in his abstract painting. He started his journey in abstract landscapes in earthen tones with pastel colours on the paper.
He created a series of paintings entitled ‘Whose Browns Burns in Me’, (Fig.5.112) in which he tries to capture the essence of varied hues of browns. “This particular series in brown seeped into my mind when I was analyzing colours. I felt brown colour was much ignored and I set out to explore the colour in all variations and depth. Brown refers to earth. As a young boy I was fascinated with the colour of soil and toiling in the fields by farmers. Like an anxious farmer waiting for the rains to parch the dry soil, my canvas absorbs the colour brown, takes shapes and forms and fills the space with tones of the earth.”

Later in 2003, colour blue emerge in his compositions and he started working with acrylic colours in his paintings. He starts from the total darkness of the canvas (created by application of the black or blue entirely) and with application of pastels, searches for the illuminating signifiers in different tonal variations. His canvases for the viewer become a meditative place to realize one’s own feel for the nature and self, and seem to help in grasping the other reality. The grains of the canvases peering through the pastel colours are absorbing, and relate to the path traversed. His works have a certain kind of illumination of their own, as the light emanating from the colour pervades the canvases, resulting in the feel of sublime and serene. Anil called his composition as ‘Innerscapes’. “…which unfolds gradually and creates a terra incognita, this is a neutral territory, an unknown place, which has been explored in a dream like state to realize, and transfuse one self with a certain tranquility. The attainment of this tranquility at a deeper level becomes a sustaining
factor for the sensibilities at stake in these aggressive times. Thus the journey taken
toward such a terra incognita is not only for aesthetic enrichment but for emotive
content." 107

Mohan Malviya was born in 1969 at Ratanpur, a small town in Madhya
Pradesh. Mohan joined the Devlalikar College of Art, Indore but he did not complete
his formal education in the visual arts. In his formative years he frequently goes to
the caves of Bhimbetka, where he drew inspiration from the dotted reliefs left
behind by our earliest ancestors. He chose to develop a natural style of his own,
unhindered by theories and methods dictated by the West.

One of the most significant aspects of Mohan’s works is the explicit use of
dots. To Mohan, everything in creation came down to a dot, making the dot a
symbol of everything and nothing. Mohan’s fascination with dots can be traced back
to the tribal people of Madhya Pradesh, as a part of their custom is to mark the body
with dotted tattoos, and like them, Mohan’s body too exhibited similar markings
which he was seen to wear with pride. These dotted tattoos that marked his body
would soon be extended onto his canvas, and come to epitomize and symbolize his
notion of creation. (Fig.5.113)
In 2004, Mohan was also awarded the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Award for his unique style of abstraction which he creates in his painting. He was yet able to emerge as an artist, gaining significant ground on the Indian art scene prior to his untimely demise in late 2008.

Born in 1974 in Madhya Pradesh, Siraj Saxena is known as an abstract landscapist. He completed his graduation in 1996 from the Government Institute of Fine Arts, Indore. His landscapes come from non existential world. Linearity is transformed into lyrical notations in the hands of Siraj Saxena who traces the circuit of charged particles in a maze to unravel the matrix of life. He has the potential to capture the light in alteration and weaves tapestries beautifully on his canvases. His paintings are reflective and authenticate to have a control on the recurring schemes of limitless varieties of patterns. (Fig.5.114)

Fig.5.114. Untitled, Acrylic on Canvas, Siraj Saxena, 2005

Paintings of Siraj Saxena can be addressed as landscapes of some specific sort. But the landscapes in his works represent inner aspect of geography and not the outer locations. Although shapes, dark regions, leaves, color patches and points are there, still there is no particular exemplification. Whatever is completely unknown is not allowed to rise to the surface of his creations. The artist is succeeded to have inculcated a unique style of exposing his idiom and his artistic originality.
Pavez Ahmed is also a significant abstractionist from the region, who is in his art quietly exploring the twilight area which lies between the self and the visible world. After completing his graduation in science, suddenly he turned towards the world of painting. He creates his style of painting which seems very close to musical compositions. Like in music there is recurrence and resonance. His abstract paintings have a rich and well controlled colour orchestration.

![Fig. 5.115. Untitled 3, Pravez Ahmed, 2005](image)

His intension is to create a small world of his own autonomous forms in his paintings. He admits that he started his painting as a realistic notion in order to put the abstraction on canvas. For him, it is important to be able to paint in realistic manner. Parvez is highly influenced by Indian colours and wants to bring vibrancy of colours into his paintings. That makes him use bright shades of red, blue, orange, etc. (Fig.5.115) He is a true abstractionist, as his forms and colours are not burdened with meanings. Pravez also have a surprising degree of sophistication in his aesthetic skill and vision.

Basant Bhargav takes inspiration from the nature in his compositions. Basant was born in 1974 at Bhopal. Basant got his formal art education from Bhopal University. He has worked on various themes through his artistic career, including the geographical diversity and beauty of his country, India. In 2005, the artist held his first solo show at Ustad Allauddin Khan Sangeet and Kala Academy, in Bhopal.
His landscapes do not refer to any specific place but rather to those he has created with his active imagination. Basant paints what he feels about what he has seen. He is interested in the abstract formulation of forms, and in giving life to form through colour. His works give the impression that the colours on the surface have taken on a life of their own, which he created with the help of a palette knife and thick brushstrokes. As he wrote “In my paintings I think about nature differently. I feel nature differently, where I decide how would be a river, a mountain, sky tree and the earth in my works. Basically all these do not belong to the optical reality but they all appear as a conversation between me and nature. This continues since last many years. To paint a black sun between the white sky is not an unnatural act for me. I look for their juxtapositions in nature and surprisingly I see it everywhere in nature. I see a movement in nature and this movement I feel on a bigger space. In my paintings lines, spaces and experienced forms emerge as a landscape in which many landscapes are being experienced.”

![Fig.5.116. Untitled, Basant Bhargav, 2003](image)

Pradeep Ahirwar also a significant artist, was born in 1972 at Bhopal. He completed his graduation in Drawing and Painting at Hamidia College, Bhopal. His exposure to wide range of original art in the Roopankar Museum and his proximity with a certain dominant section of modern art that rated the abstract over figuration certainly inspired Pradeep to look into the possibilities of pure fro deeply than ever before. He states “I believe abstraction can touch upon something primary about our direct perception of being human. I’m interested in connecting the complex relationships between the natural world and personal experience as they relate to color, scale, line, texture and direction.”
Pradeep also take inspiration from nature and creates his own style in abstraction. He paints his compositions with brilliant hues of blues and reds, which creates a tension in his picture space. In his abstract compositions Pradeep offers an interesting play between what appears to be a flat surface and frequently created deep space through his loose flowing expressionistic brush strokes. This reveals a dual tendency to evaluate experience as a sedimentary formation which can be penetrated to expose areas of ultimate meaning or non-meaning. (Fig. 5.117)

Manoj Kanchangal is also a significant abstractionist. He was born in Shadhora, Madhya Pradesh, in 1979. In 1997, he had completed his post-graduation in painting from Art College, Indore. In his early career, he usually paints landscapes of surrounding areas like old fort of Mandu, ruins of the monuments etc. These initial years saw him exploring the alchemy of colours, technique, material, space and the structure of the form. Gradually transformation comes in his work through a long struggle.

In 1999, he started working in water colours to create the illusion of opaqueness of the acrylic or poster colours. In an attempt to explore effect, he pulled soft cakes of water-colours into impasto ribbon with a metal ruler. He also uses the liquidated water colours to create colour-fields in his compositions. Later, Manoj delve deep in his practice to develop a understanding of form, space, colour and composition.
Most of his works shows the beauty of colourful and textured landscapes, made with the help of criss-crossing knife strokes, and horizontal planes running parallel to each other. He is creating landscapes but with a difference, these landscapes never represent any geographical territory. “Of course Manoj works both from nature immediate, as from memory. But with his fair technical control he produces works of delicacy and assurance.” In his compositions Manoj perceives the reality from the natural world but transform it in the objective reality. His compositions look like the abstracted landscapes. “The wholeness of his canvasses derive more from our feeling and insight to the landscapes – and indeed, that is the whole point of abstract painting” (Fig.5.118)

The art scene in Bhopal is mostly about finding an Indian abstract art style which has drawn on tantric, geometric, folk and tribal symbols. The aesthetic impact of this art form has percolated to other art centers too. Young artists who came to work in the Bhopal institution carried back this brand of art to various cities. Other important names of this generation of artists are Harchandan Singh Bhatti, Faiza Huma, Vishakha apte, Govind Viswas, Bimmi Anwar, Anita Soni, Archna Yadav, J.S.Shardha, Hemant Rao, Padamkat Santape etc. Today Madhya Pradesh is nourishing many new talents who are finding fresh grounds to showcase their creative sensibilities.
5.5 Development of Abstraction in Bengal

Though it is conventional thought that realism is the oldest form of art, it is big misnomer. In fact abstraction is probably older than realism. In actuality abstraction is nothing but representing only certain aspects of reality. This simplification when taken to an extreme level where the art does not resemble nature in any manner, do we get pure abstraction. Like pure realism, pure abstraction is also impossible to make. From the early twentieth century modern art movement in Bengal was strongly dominated by the figurative genres. The Bengal School artists like Abanindranath Tagore and his disciple Nandalal Bose had been generally averse to pure abstraction. But, in the twenties and thirties, Gagnendranath Tagore’s cubist experiments and the doodling of Rabindranath Tagore were the earlier experiments in the genre of abstraction in the art of Bengal.

In the early1940s, some young artist belongs to Rebel Art Center, also aimed to develop the anti-sentimental art based on the European modernist movements. It was later generation painters like Gopal Ghosh and Gobardhan Ash who had brought abstraction to Bengal art scene. Gobardhan Ash painted some compositions with bold calligraphy like brush strokes, which also shows his locomotive gesture as an important entity in the painting. He had painted a few numbers of abstract compositions, which are very unique to his time.

In 50’s few younger artists in Bengal were also showing leanings towards Expressionism. They were used to make painting with appliqué and collages in the abstract format. But very few such artists have shown much consistency and strength. Among the semi abstractionists the best known of Bengal painters is probably Paritosh Sen. His works inspired by Cubist works of Picasso do not look cubist but leans more towards abstraction.

In the post-independence Bengal, generally, artists made their painting practice for their own expression rather than for the market. Figurative trends were still dominating the art scene in the sixties and seventies in Bengal. Thus abstract works were seldom exhibited. In the seventies, Benode Bihari Mukherjee, a blind artist made quick sketches without removing the pen. This started a new trend of single line drawings which was later adopted by many other painters. The reason for
abstract painting in Bengal had never been for mere expression of emotion, but the quest for inner revelation.

Fig.5.119. A Flame, Gopal Ghose, 1946

Ganesh Haloi was a significant painter whose works made him, one of the most original abstract artists in the contemporary art of Bengal. “From the eastern fringe of India, the art of Ganesh Haloi holds that unique and unparallel identity worldwide that perpetuates the essence of his being and philosophies the broader aspect of nature and transformation or transition of human life from the lap of nature to the concreteness of isolation clogged within walls with pain, pathos and shades of deep realization.”

Ganesh Haloi was born in 1936 in Jamalpur (Now in Bangladesh). He had come to Calcutta after the Partition in 1950. He had got his formal education in art at the Government College of Art and Craft in Calcutta from where he graduated in 1956. In his early period he had devoted six years to create the replicas of the Ajanta murals for the Archaeological Survey of India. The Ajanta experience strongly influenced him and his art. In his early period, he had worked in many mediums and styles including figurative and landscapes. But after coming back to Calcutta, he moved towards landscapes. Later in the early sixties, he gradually turned towards abstract landscapes after a tour of the ruins of Gour Pandua in north Bengal. He had created his own vocabulary dots, dashes and lines, which transforms into cryptic signs in his compositions implicitly represent the nature. In this period, he mostly
worked with the medium of watercolours on the Nepali paper. His painting ‘Crocodile Hunt’ (Fig.5.120) is one of significant painting of his early period.

![Crocodile Hunt, Ganesh Haloi, 1963](image1)

Later, Ganesh Haloi had developed an abstract language that was much like personal notations. He usually paints the landscapes, which seems to emerge as landscapes of his mind. “His early works were private expressions/reactions to reality, yet their expressionistic quality reached out to have dialogue with the viewers. Landscapes were favorite themes but they never were represented in his work but rather acted as the starting point for contemplation from which the
‘metascapes’ were built“¹¹³ Haloi appears to try to understand the mysteries of the earth from the aerial vantage point. Some mysterious signs can be discerned on his canvas, which seems to beckon the artist silently. “His recollection of a world long abandoned took the form of abstract landscapes and his deep link with nature soon became his strong force.”¹¹⁴

Ganesh Haloi’s creations are abstract in character, reflecting the deeper understanding of nature and its varied colours and moods. According to the artist geometry comes from the earth, a form of universal system, where everything appears at once simple and complex. (Fig.5.122, 5.123) Haloi’s warm earthy colours and spontaneity reveals that he has an authentic intimacy with the common earth. Nature, to him, is not a field to conquest, but rather than an expression of the environs in which life is placed. “For Ganesh Haloi, perceiving and understanding nature can be equated with life because they have eventually intersected and formed the undercurrent as well as the external envelop in his works and thought process. It can thus be stated that the rich and varied experiences of our life moulds to a greater extent the shape of things to come in our mature age when we try to formulate a discourse through it. Metaphorically, it is like a tree that owes its growth as much to the sky as to the ground on which it stands firmly rooted. For the life of the tree and its basic sustenance it draws light from nature and food from soil, but can from both be separated! It is more or less the same force that enables the tree to bear fruits and flowers.”¹¹⁵
Haloi wisely does not crowd his pictures. Much is rightly left to the imagination of the discerning eye. He makes only subtle suggestions. In some of his paintings, large areas are left to be unworked and certain architectural abstract forms had emerged on his canvas. “Abstraction is not as simple as the application of brushwork, technique, texture or colours manipulated by the artist. It is created through mental debate with the artist’s experiences, displayed through line and colour as is clear in Haloi’s work.”\(^{116}\) (Fig. 5.123)

In his abstract landscapes, Ganesh Haloi had used a wide range colours, including of warm and cool shades and even sometimes almost monochromatic. His intension was to capture the essence of the surrounding nature in his composition. In the later phase, he had started to paint with the gouache colours on the Nepali paper. “His later works are highly abstracted and were both cerebral and romantic. He using his preferred gouache technique created spaces of warm earth tones that spoke of tranquility. Yet they were empty two dimensional spaces which reflected the melancholic undertones. The spaces were contrasted with geometric patterns further enhancing their void-ness. The lyrical undertones add to be romantic feel of his usually untitled works.”\(^{117}\) (Fig. 5.124)
Ganesh Haloi’s throughout his five decade long career constantly evolved with his creative imagination to create his abstract works. As he states, “Without this continuity there would be nothing original in the artist’s achievement, no unity underlying all the diverse works he creates at different phases of life from the early years till the grand old age. All our ceaseless and joyous perceptions of the mighty world of eyes and ears with its infinite variety take on diverse 'beauteous forms' deep down in our mind under the stress of ever changing moods and moments. But it is in our nature that we try to free ourselves from the rigid mould of habitual perception to take a fresh look at everything visual or conceptual. My painting is an aspirant for such freedom.” Ganesh Haloi still continues with his innovative painting practice within the frameworks of abstraction.

Bal Raj Panesar, was also an important artist in the contemporary art of Bengal. Panesar was born in 1927 in Punjab. He came to Kolkata to study Statistics at the Indian Statistical Institute, and later he was settled there. He usually practices collage and painting during his spare time just to fulfill his inner urge to paint and self expression.

In his earlier period, Panesar had started to experiment with the paper collage in which he usually makes landscapes. His earlier landscapes in collage had not represented visible reality. His collage practice inspires him to experiment in painting. He was a self thought artist and had no formal training in art. Panesar’ abstract paintings are important in the context of abstraction in the art of post-independence Indian art. He had also done works in etching and ink on paper.
Panesar’s landscapes are abstract in their character, but they also leave the some hints for the viewer. His strong point, of course, is colour, which he handles with a good deal of aplomb. Using the perception of the real and unreal, texture with brush strokes, colours and tones, forms and spaces, Panesar creates his own oeuvre with the pictorial world. (Fig. 5.125)

![Fig. 5.125. Untitled, Acrylic, Bal Raj Panesar](image)

Somenath Hore's graphic prints of the 'Wounds' (Fig. 5.126) series are also important in the context of abstraction. Hore was deeply influenced by the famine of 1943. The trauma of the human suffering left its mark on his work as it did on some
other painters of his generation. In his wounds series he had been worked with the paper pulp printed from molded cement matrices. “It is these series of observed moments of torture and suffering that surfaced later in 'Wounds'. The white-on-white works, with occasional stains of red have a three-dimensional quality that captures the actual enactment of wounding with an expressionistic fervour. In his series ‘Wounds’, white emerges as a symbol, an area of colour denoting a concept, a state of mind, a state of being: approaching, thereby, the purity of abstraction.”

Badhan Das was also a significant artist, in the context of abstraction. He was born in 1944. Bandhan Das graduated twice, in painting and in ceramics, from the Government College of Art and Craft, Calcutta, where he later became a teacher. Throughout his life he works in various styles and mediums but later he turned towards the non-figurative style of painting. He usually paints abstract landscapes in almost monochromatic colours. He created a certain kind of mysterious atmosphere, a moment of serenity and stillness in his abstract landscapes. His landscapes are desolate landscapes, as he plays between darkness and light, still shapes, painted with the large colour planes. Eventually, what emerges is an expanse of empty spaces, around which the artists reconstructs a central mass of mountains, clouds and planes. (Fig.5.127, 5.128)
Hiran Mitra, was born in 1945, in a small village of Kharagpur. From his childhood days he had a great interest in painting. He had completed his studies at Government Art College of Kolkata in 1966. Since then, Mitra’s had made a significant contribution to various aspects of the Indian art world including theatre, literature and fine arts. His varied interest in different respective fields of art had allowed him to experiment within his work. His abstract paintings are highly influenced from the gesture of dance choreography and Chinese and Arabic calligraphy, which is visible in his approach of making varied shapes in his compositions. “He creates non-objective shapes which seem to emerge out of the flatness of the background and seem to float over and above, hovering tentatively, as it were. What is especially interesting and noteworthy is the strong Oriental feel that is integral to his work- like, for instance, the unmistakable calligraphic quality found in many of his paintings.”

In later period, his paintings focus on textural surface and his ability to explore in his methods through the unconventional use of acrylics and industrial paints. “One may discern a philosophical take on the emerging elements that rise to the surface, restless and floating: notwithstanding the sheer delight in the shapes that are created, they are also strong conceptual symbols that covertly illustrate the
artist's negotiation with life. His works often assume a visual interface between lightness and weight, freed from both context and semblance, approaching pure abstraction.”

Later in the 1980s, 1990s the artists like Amitava Dhar, Samit Dey, Arindam Chatterjee and Samindranath Majumdar also became well-known exponents of abstract art in Bengal. Since the 1990s, the abstract art in Bengal has been in such diverse ways that it has become difficult to place it in a uniform context. These artists come from desperate backgrounds but are developing their work to reflect the unique climate and culture of Bengal. They try to resolutely combat the situation in which they are placed, each keeping his creative vision alive.
Amitava was born in 1957 at Kidderpore in Kolkata, where he spent his early childhood days. Later, he moved to the Kolkata city. He had achieved his formal education at Government College of Art & Craft in Kolkata. Amitava Dhar, however, is one of significant artists who had been practice abstraction in painting since the early 80s. But gradually his images began to include shapes and form not identifiable but strongly suggestive of animals. The makes his abstract paintings more intriguing and mysterious. (Fig.5.131, 5.132)

Through the deliberate distortion of form he evolved his distinct vocabulary. Amitava’s compositions are shocking, which seems to depict the psychic formation of nightmares, which evokes a sense of terror. “Unfulfilled desires and wishes, unresolved conflicts give rise to inner tensions which could trouble our sleep. In sleep, our relation to reality is temporarily suspended and repressed desires seek expression through dreams or nightmares.”122 His compositions are not realistic images, but rendered two-dimensionally on the surface of his camases. “…the method he puts to use for representation – if representation it is in the accepted sense – together with the nature of the thrust which drives him as he grapples with the task he has set himself. Short of this, however, an honest if unambitious answer of a tentative nature may possibly be ventured hesitantly.”123

Arindam Chaterjee evolved a style of creation of landscapes in which the so-called subject totally excluded. He stressed on conjuring up a non-representational space by the free manipulation of colours. He had formally trained at the Govt. College of Art in Kolkata and later at Kala Bhavan in Shantiniketan.

Fig.5.133. Untitled, Arindam Chaterjee, 2004
Arindam Chatterjee’s large painterly abstract canvases in which lines, textures, tones, and spaces enact a complex interplay of multiple layers of acrylic, charcoal, and pastel. “The forms seem to emerge from a deep core and fit into the pictorial space like the rock and pebbles finding their niche in the riverbed. The visual reflection of the journey within the perfected by the use of brief patches of colour juxtaposed with the sudden elemental shadow. The visual discovery underlying is reflected by subtle change of different colour sets. The varied forms merge and re-emerge as newer forms, blazing with an innate strength of feeling, yet blurring the edges and awakening an ever-throbbing memory that touches the web of consciousness only to disappear in the unconsciousness.”\textsuperscript{124}

His Compositions sporting darker shades of brown and gray and partly streaked with arterial strokes of black exude a feel of mystic solemnity. The colours appear in layers, revealing and hiding the underlying textures planes. His exuberance in delineation of his experience is founded on his mastery over his medium, technique and his understanding of nature's aesthetics. Frequently, his style constrained to monochromes. His artworks reflect contemplative and peaceful quality. Still, distinctive dynamism keeps on lingering at the surface. “Arindam’s paintings seem to evoke the sensuous joy of endless walk in a silent world where the rhythm and spirit of the journey is the only vibrating force. The tranquil world with his suggestive eloquence resonates within the heart of a kindred soul.”\textsuperscript{125} (Fig.5.133)
Born in 1966 in Bengal, Samrindernath Mazumdar is known as an abstract landscapist. He completed his post-graduation from the Rabindra Bharti University at Shantiniketan. He started his journey in abstract landscapes in earthen shades using the layers of to create the textural canvas. His compositions seem to depict architectural substance from the aerial perspective. One of the most important aspect about his compositions is his use of somber hues, which created a moment of serenity and stillness in his abstract landscapes. Like a city plan these inner and outer spaces, takes their own forms on the canvas as they appear and disappear through various layers of colours. (Fig.5.134)

Sunil De gradually developed his style of abstract imagery, which is very personal to him. Interacting with the paint, canvas and tools; he seems to pay attention to the physical qualities of the paint itself, its texture and nature. His brush strokes which consists of layering of paint, the image take shape through bold and yet intricate texturisation. His expressionistic strokes of paint create compositions densely layered all-over. These works deals with what is considered to be formal elements of abstract painting, pure, un-modulated areas of colour on flat two-dimensional space. He also used the archaeological symbols, script-like marks, in his compositions, which are undecipherable. The surface of the painting, between the strokes and these motifs, create a compound blend of colour texture and movement. (Fig.5.135, 5.136)

Samit Dey is one of the front runners among the young artist in the contemporary Indian art, who is known for his large abstract works. He had
completed his post-graduation in painting from Visva Bharati University at Santiniketan. He has developed own style of work that is characterized by a unique approach and a grip on technique. Samit works chiefly in monochromes with his expressionistic strokes. His chromatic vision gives credence to a search, which traverses through his brush strokes of thick colours. First he builds the surface of his canvas by the subdued colours and then he applied the thick patches of white, ochre or green, which create interest in the picture space. “It is necessary for him that his paintings follows an internal spontaneous spirituality and becomes a self-generating organism. A hidden recesses of creativity to be fathomed only by the spectator.”

He never makes reference on his canvases to anything having a natural appearance. He develops his style of abstract painting which has a unique sophistication and rusticity. (Fig.5.137)

Today, many talented artists are choosing abstraction as the medium of their expression, not only as for experimentation but for the inner revelation. The development of abstraction in contemporary art of Bengal reveals strong strands of reliance on nature, as well as a disinclination to reject the representational. Many significant artists had found their inspiration from nature, and developed their own styles in abstraction. Though, this is more of a tracing of individual tales of growth, and as such, there should justifiably be some resistance to classification. But now, the initial confrontation between Oriental and Western visual cultures has continued new generations of abstractionists.
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