An Insight into the Artists: Strategies of Being

Syed Haider Raza

Raza was born in 1922 in Babria, in the district of Narsimhapur in Madhya Pradesh.¹ His father Sayed Mohammed Razi was a Forest Conservation Officer in the district. “As a child, Raza lived in a perfect accord with the nature surrounding him and his and he was alive to the smallest stir of the forest.”² Raza’s father was a man of integrity, profoundly religious and yet liberal and open to ideas of other religions, particularly Hinduism. “His mother’s affection and the strict, though valid educational principles of his father along with a host of experience gained in forest, helped Raza to go spiritually.”³ His early education was first held in Mandla and then in Damoh, where he completed his high school education at the age of seventeen. In Mandla, at the age of 10 or 12, he usually sketched at nearside the river ‘Narmada’. And when he shifted to Damoh, he started painting flowers, birds and the play of sunlight on nature. He usually makes landscapes inspired from his surroundings nature.

The experiences of life directly or indirectly influence the perception and expression of humans. Early childhood memories and experiences, family ties, interaction peers and teachers, influences the mind of the artists. In his childhood in the village school of Kakaiya, his teacher Shri Nand Lalji Jharia was an inspiring teacher and gave Raza’s his first lessons on meditative thinking. He would put a dot on a white wall and ask Raza to sit down and simply focus on this dot. “It was only several years later that Raza realized that the teacher had tried to focus his mind on the dot, on the point of concentration that is the Bindu. This experience later became one of his major source of inspiration and even far from home it never ceased to haunt him.”⁴ Syed Haider Raza’s traditional education during his childhood, later emanates in many of his paintings.

Raza started his education in drawing and painting at Nagpur School of Art in 1939. At Nagpur, he was trained in academic style of painting, which included both portrait and landscape painting under the guidance of teachers like
M.Y. Athwale and Vasant Kelkar. While studying in Nagpur, Raza learnt to work both in the western and traditional Indian styles in painting. “The Art School in Nagpur was structured on the British academic concepts and had very little to do with either the Indian reality or the Indian traditions of visual arts. The training gave him skills but no vision; in any case, a kind of confusion as to how to go about painting in India. One could imitate the Western manner but creating something, which was both contemporary and Indian, was far from realization.”

In 1943, He came to Bombay and start working there as an artist at Express Block Studio. During period he had taught drawing at Gondiya Municipal High School and then in Government Normal School at Amrawati. “He also attentively pursued his studies of Indian mythological works and the the Western masters by reading magazines and books on art lent to him by friends, who offered him access to their personal libraries.” During this period of time Raza had managed to continue his studies in art at a private art institute Mohan Art Club run by Mohan Kulkarni. “It was only now that Raza’s real apprenticeship as an artist began. His new life in Bombay he opened for a 21-year old painter the doors of a big city and an important art centre. Coming from Nagpur, he slowly took cognisance of the bubbling cultural activities in this metropolis, here the press gave full coverage to new artistic talent and where large industrial groups, the Birlas and Tatas, patronized and sponsored young artists.”

Despite all the barriers, Raza had continued his painting practice. His paintings of this period were usually figurative compositions such as ‘Omkareshwar’, ‘Waterfall at Mandu’ (Fig.6.1). Raza was highly fascinated with the city life of the Bombay. The city becomes a new subject matter for him. He painted a series of watercolours depicting the city of Bombay in which his watercolour of ‘Bazaar Gate’ was significant example of this period. In 1947, he had received his diploma from the J.J.School of Art, Bombay. During this period he also came into contact with some eminent artists, teachers and critics. Among them Professor Walter Langhammer, who was the Art director at Times of India in Bombay and art critic Rudy Von Lyden were significant. French photographer Henry Cartier Bresson also had a great impact on him to whom Raza met during his exhibition at Srinagar in 1947. He was Bresson, who advised him to study the pictorial structure of form in
the paintings of Cezanne. Later, Raza manage to bring some books on Cezanne so that he could study Cezanne’s works.

The years 1947-1948 were really difficult years for him. “In 1947, his mother passed away, who was staying with him at his residence in Kalyan, a town east of Bombay. A year later in May 1948, his father passed away in Mandla.” India received independence but it brought into Raza’s life mixed emotions of enthusiasm and sadness. “At the young age of 25, he had to accept the full responsibility of the family.” The division of the country, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, and the death of his parents deeply influenced Raza as well as his practice in painting.

Raza, along with artists, F. N. Souza, Maqbool Fida Husain, K. H. Ara, S. K. Bakre and H. A. Gade founded the Progressive Artists Group in 1947. Most of the PAG artists were highly influenced from Western avant-guard styles. “French contemporary art and German Expressionism made the great impact on the young artists. They began to understand that pictorial relevance was not just a matter of subject and theme, but that it was associated with a new formal perception of colour and the way a painting was organized.” PAG held his first exhibition in 1948 in Bombay and then in 1950. The Group was short lived but it had a great impact on the development of modern art in India. It is now evident that their work in this period opened up new avenues.
Most of the works of this period of Raza was expressionistic landscapes. He worked on paper and canvas using pure painting elements. He painted the ‘The Moon’ in 1949, which is a significant painting of his career. The structure of the geometrical shapes in the architecture of the rooftops touched the glow of the moonlight on them. “It shows a city square surrounded by houses”\textsuperscript{11} Raza’s approach to the depiction of the forms in the painting was more formal than his previous works. His intention was to move away from the reality and create more simplified structure of forms by implying geometrical forms in the painting.

A French exhibition at Bombay was really an important exhibition, which consists of a large selection of reproduction of modern French painters including Braque, Rouault, Mattise, Van Gough and Cezanne. Raza was highly influenced from French contemporary art. His passion for French painting boosts him to join the French language course at Alliance Francaisaie, which he completed in 1950. In the same year Raza had got the French Government scholarship to study art at Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Raza leave the India in 1950 to compete his two year scholarship program in France.

“Raza, by the time he left for Paris he was so taken up with the Indian style and the Indian concepts that for two years in Paris he worked in the Indian style: landscapes, housescapes, earthscapes reconstructed.”\textsuperscript{12} From 1953 till 1960 Raza was a part of the French school. After 1953 he stopped to do watercolors in the
Indian style, he launched out into finding out what was oil painting, what was Cezanne, and what were French landscapes. At this period he launched into the adventure of French painting and started painting in oils, tried to understand that which the French called so beautifully ‘le snes plastique’. He painted the ‘Haut de Cagnes’ (Fig.6.3) in 1951 and ‘The Black Sun’ in 1953 which were significant paintings of Raza’s formative years in Paris. He also painted the ‘Eglise’ series (Fig.6.4) inspired from French rural areas. He realized that it was an understanding of those pictorial elements, which were fundamental in painting; problems of colors, space, and their orchestration. At this time, Raza visited Italy for three months. It was a great inspiration and a learning experience for him from the cities like Florence and Rome. “He was back to France with full of ideas and work, made experiments and mistakes.”

Raza, his early themes were drawn from his memories of a childhood spent in the forests of his native village of Barbaria, in Madhya Pradesh. Raza's style has evolved over the years -he began with expressionist landscapes, which became rigid, geometric representations of landscape in the 1950s. Later, in 1960s the lines blurred and color began to dominate in his paintings such as ‘Ciel Rouge Sur Le L'ac’ (Fig.6.6), ‘Mist’ (Fig.), ‘Solitary Places’ (Fig.6.8) and Village at Gorbio (Fig.6.7). His theme was still landscape but it was now non-representational. Nature had always been a significant place in his paintings. “Nature has remained for him a pictorial metaphor. The forest, the mountain, the river, The sun exploding with energy and vibrations, dominating the landscapes. These are the compelling forces,
creating a timeless zone. The elements become magnetic, as the only force to control this world and to bring us closer to sense of harmony and visual order.”

Raza, his art in early time of France had attracted attention of many including some important Parisian critics. One such senior critic was Waldemar George who, incidentally, had discovered artists like Soutine and Modigliani. Claude Roger-Marx, the critic of Le Figaro and Jacques Lassaigne, who was to become the Director of the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, wrote enthusiastically and perceptively about Raza’s art. “Positive critical response to his work helped the reputation of Raza grow as an artist distinct from others.”

In 1962, Professor Karl Kasten becomes instrumental to call him as a visiting professor at Berkeley University in California. Raza spent tenure of three months at the Berkeley University, in which he was involved in various academic and artistic pursuits. “Raza totally devoted himself to his assignment to transmit his artistic fervour to his young students.” He also visited to New York, San Francisco, and the West coast. His works in this period was strongly influenced by the abstract expressionist movement. Raza spent good deal of his time visiting and viewing the works of other contemporaries of his time and he found a close affinity between the works of Hans Hofmann and his own ideas. The unstructured compositions of Mark
Rothko and Jackson Pollock inspired Raza to experiment with color and space in new ways. “Hans Hofmann based his theory on faith and the universal laws that governed by nature, while affirming the primacy of the artist’s intuitive sensitivity. Raza adhered to this concept of art, which was to emerge in his choice of themes associated with nature, where his own sensitivity is omnipresent.”

After his six months stay in America, Raza came back to France. Raza’s work was still relatively figurative, by the time he thought that one could discern the landscapes, the houses, the trees, the churches that he painted, inspired by nature. In 1960’s French art scene was dominated by Non-objective or Non-representational painting. That was the time when Raza move towards the gestural abstraction. The visual reality was visible, slowly, almost in a natural order of the paintings became more fluent, more sensual, more or less geometric. (Fig.6.10, 6.11, 6.12)
Raza’s earlier fascination with geometry further developed a new resonance with colour. Now colours in his paintings are a way of expression of his immediate emotions. In his representative works, ‘La Source’ and ‘L’Ete’ (Fig.6.11) he painted in a sensuous approach to nature as it depicted his constant search for the unknown reverberations of nature. The themes of earth, fire, water and air, which became significant in his artistic vocabulary in later years, emerged in these compositions. “He gave importance to the climate, the feeling, and the sentiments which he lived and which all the landscapes revealed. He realized that in a painting this investing of climate, a mood is an Indian concept. He constantly gave importance to the desire to paint a mood of the morning or the day, or of an evening like in the ‘ragas’ and ‘raginis’. This research he had for almost 15 years.”

His palette returns to the Indian sensibility, and it establishes an immediate distance from other forms of gestural expressionism. Like the Ragamala paintings of Indian miniature tradition, where artists inscribed the text of the raga they were illustrating, in to the painting, Raza, too, began to include profound Sanskrit chants, snippets of Hindi and Urdu verses on his canvases. “The raga and the ragamala have inspired the fabric of Raza’s pictures. These themes relate to his interest noted already in his paintings begun in the 1960s: to express moods, times of the day and the seasons, not through narrative or the figurative but through gestural treatment. North Indian music and Hindi poetry have been a continuing source of enrichment. He brings the three together, music and poetry and painting, and in the manner of
Rajasthan painting, he often inscribes a verse in his own work.”¹⁹ As a later development, the phrases and lines expanded into complete poems and dohas from the writings of Kabir, Ghalib, and some of the contemporary poets from the subcontinent. Raza used the poetic phases in his paintings in such a manner that neither the poetry nor the painting seemed to dominate the space but coexisted with certain kind of harmony.

His paintings such as ‘Maa’ (Fig.6.19) in which he inscribed ‘Maa, Lotkar Jab Aaunga, Kya Launga?’ (Mother, When I return, what should I bring back) a line from the poem of Ashok Vajpeyi is a significant example of its own kind. His intention was to create the feeling and emotion in the work through the use of poetic phrases in his work. “He was particularly concerned with the metaphysical aspects of his surroundings, where emotion is associated with the soul (atman) as much a part of human life as of art”²⁰ While reading poetry, prose or anything thoughtful, he usually writes down whatever stuck to him. Further these notations he used in his paintings. Some of his important works in which he used such inscriptions are ‘Kaliyan’ (Fig.6.20), ‘Sansara’ (Fig.6.21) ‘Amar Jiva’, ‘Aparna’ and ‘Bharta’ are important in this context.

It was not easy to acquire some measure of success and have a standing in France and Europe. “His ambition was greater and he thought that he has to go back to his sources to the sources of India, to Indian philosophy, to his roots, to childhood and try to study more seriously the fundamental principles that underlie the Indian arts, Indian painting, music, dance, philosophy, literature and poetry.”²¹ Raza,
started to visit India regularly in this period. He went there almost every year, trying to study in the museums, in the caves, in the villages, in the cities Mathura, Sanchi, Ellora, Ajanta, Elephanta, and Textile Museum in Ahmedabad. He saw villages and towns in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and particularly in Rajasthan, Udaipur and Jaisalmer, which had made a tremendous fascination to him and his painting. (Fig.6.13, 6.14)

It was during these journeys that he reflected on his childhood where his teacher Shri Nand Lalji Jharia had put a dot on the white wall and asked him to meditate on it. In his childhood he didn’t understand the importance of this. But during his visits to India, this lesson haunted him and he saw it as the most extraordinary yogic exercise given to him. He started meditating on the point in the solitude of his little rooms in Bombay and later in his home in Paris. “And one night in southern France in Gorbio the revelation of the ‘Bindu’ came to his mind as a point of departure; a unity of tremendous force, power, energy which the Bindu contained both as an idea and as a seed, a drop, a unity, a geometrical form, a point, a circle containing all the different geometrical shapes, triangles and colors. He thought that, that night something new was opening up; it was a tremendous revelation for him. Paintings had come, one after another, as revelations of the same theme. One painting has been leading to another and growing from dark void to the coolers of the five elements, white, black, yellow, red and blue. Something akin to
Panchatatva: ‘Kshiti, jal, pavak, gagan, sameera’ (earth, water, fire, sky, and wind)\textsuperscript{22} (Fig. 6.18), since this period Raza has been working on this idea till present. (Fig. 6.15, 6.16, 6.17, 6.24, 6.25)

In the late 70s, 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.”\textsuperscript{23} The circle or Bindu now became more of an icon, sacred in its symbolism, and placing his work in an Indian context. “To Indians the bindu traditionally represents an important point of concentration. It is in fact the primordial symbol of energy and stands for the idea of the beginning and the end, of the cosmic emergence of the quintessence of life….In Indian aesthetic the Bindu is extremely important symbol that not only carries a philosophic significance, but is also a geometric figure momentous in shaping of the space. It appears not only in manuscripts, on temples and homes, but also on the forehead of the many Indian womens.”\textsuperscript{24} Raza perceives the Bindu (Dot) 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”\textsuperscript{25} 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.
The Bindu transform in to his paintings depicted as a complete colour filled dark circle. Raza began to realize that darkness within the circle seemed to him a representation of the philosophic concept of the seed of creation. In his paintings this form began to take on several meanings and suggestive interpretations. “The obscure black space is charged with latent force aspiring to fulfillment. Like the universal order of the earth-seed’ relationship, the original form of the Bindu emerges and unfolds itself in black space. All inherent forces unite. A vertical line intersects a horizontal line, engendering energy and light. Space is charged. Contours appears, and colours: white, yellow, red and blue along with the original black, They compose the colour spectrum of the visible world”

Fig.6.20 Kaliyan, S.H.Raza, 1990
Fig.6.21. Sansara, S.H.Raza, 1994
Fig.6.26a. Triangles, S.H.Raza, 1997
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 Purush-Prakriti (Male and Female), Panch Tatva (Five Elements) (Fig.6.27a), Bija (Seed), Kudilini (Latent Energy) (Fig.6.23), Naad (Sound), Spandan (Vibrations) (Fig.6.28a) and Shunya (Emptiness). “Raza neither repeats the forms of his tradition, nor does he plagiaries foreign modernist forms – he relentlessly invents hitherto unknown forms, renewing India’s artistic heritage by a style of painting that can be compared to Kandinsky and Klee and then to mid-20th century abstraction”27

In 1980s Raza’s style was still same as before but with some changes in the composition. The thin lines came again in his painting with more simplification and open space. Raza’s work became a metaphor he wanted to express. The Bindu developed the concept of the ‘Bija’ (Fig.6.30a) or the seed, the ‘Kundilini’ (Fig.6.23), the ‘Puncha Tatva’ (Fig.6.18) and ‘Prakriti’ beside others. His art began to evoke meditation and the works became abstraction of universal truths. He also explored the concept of ‘Shunya’, the state of primeval emptiness in his paintings.
Raza gave more importance to the method in his painting. He also gives importance to the thoughts and philosophy, which he considered as a real soul of painting. But Raza’s main concern is the method. Each of his painting is well planned with careful finishing. He achieved a level of meditation in the process of making of his painting. His art delves as much into an inner quest for personal growth as it explores the richness of spiritual treatises to articulate the intellectual undertones of his paintings. “To Raza painting is akin to the meditative practice of ‘japa’, the fully engaged repetition of a mantra until it is deepened and concentrated into the pathway of energy.”28 His art lends itself to a quest for intensity. That can be seen in his works such as ‘Surya’ (Fig.6.22), ‘Kundalini’ (Fig.6.3), and ‘Five Chakras’ (6.27a).
Raza, being a true colourist, he treats his colour palette with colour symbolism. In his simplified geometric compositions, each colour had its own symbolic meaning which makes his compositions a thoughtful object of contemplation rather than mere a geometrical design. “When you look at any colours in Raza’s painting, you find them illuminated, clear with their full intensity. Blue is warm as red and red has a calm attraction of white”\textsuperscript{29} “Through this symbolism, Raza translates the organic processes of germination, growth, decay and resurgence into geometry of the Sublime. While he has translated the landscape into the deep color saturations of an abstract pictorial space annotated with a floating poem, on occasion, Raza more often invokes the theme of fertility through such key motifs as the bija or seed, the bindu or focal source, which occupy a central place in his private mythology”\textsuperscript{30} He deeply researched with the geometrical forms to express his meditative themes, which are rooted in the Indian tantric philosophy. He often paints on the themes, which are in itself abstract in nature such as ‘Naad’, ‘Spandan’, ‘Ankuram’ and ‘Prakriti’.

In the decade of nineties Raza developed a more simplified attitude towards the fabrication of the form in his composition. (Fig.6.22, 6.23) In the Later 90’s his colour palettes restricted to the shades of white and black. These paintings of Raza showed his more mature attitude toward colours. “For the better understanding of how Raza settled into the mature phase of his art, we will first broach his painting technique, his vocabulary and his thought process. Raza has long believed that painting is a manual process, but since he reached “maturity” as an artist, he links painting above all to reflection, to meditation”\textsuperscript{31} “His works, present themselves as objects in space. The essential definition and meaning of the square, Circle and triangle, as expounded by canonical texts on art in ancient India is amplified on a Raza canvas, with subdued tones that denote the color of vibration. Edges emerge, expand and extend into the region of white. The joy of being engaged in the essences of this binary universal is possible when a perception of the archetypal sacramental presences comes in to play. It is not concretely visible, for it is energy of line and form and the fertile nature of Raza's abstraction that induces the axial movement of the eye. The experience of a sensuous pause, over the incredible
gestures of microtones of the white color-chroma brings a slow pace to the perception of coming in to being of the heraldic sign of a divinity.”32

His paintings of this phase are ‘Shanti Bindu’ (Fig.6.25), ‘Bindu’ (Fig.6.24), ‘Jagriti’, ‘The White Flower’ and ‘The White Cross’. His “White canvases are not un-painted canvases. On the contrary, they reveal a very sophisticated geometric construction, leading to a pure harmony, to peace or the Shanti Rasa. Of the nine emotions this is - according to Indian thought - the most difficult to achieve. It calls for years of sustained effort, research and expression, both in life and in artistic pursuits”33

Raza repeatedly used motifs from Indian tantra philosophy, showing clearly that tradition permeates through expression. After moving to Europe, the new views of Europe including western modernism influenced him deeply. Mixture of eastern and western art helps him to create a unique style of painting. Raza has been living in Europe for more than half century and yet his roots are in his motherland. “At his most prolific, Raza retains a passionate link with experience drawing from indigenous sources, from the hot colours of Rajasthan and the miniatures, from the neutral landscapes of his country and from its metaphysical and literary thought in a distinctive manner”34 After half a century of experience in painting, he has evolved into deep meditative painter.
K.C.S. Panikar

Kovalezhi Cheerampathoor Sankaran Paniker, who led the Madras art movement in 1960s, was one of the most significant artists of the modern Indian art. K.C.S. Panicker was born in 1911 at Coimbatore in Tamilnadu. His father was a medical officer in Madras Medical Services. He had got his formal education in Ponani in Kerela and Madras. He had a great interest in painting as he started making landscape in his childhood days. In this period he was highly influenced from the British landscape painters. He also took a job in the Indian telegraph department, but later, he quit from the job to pursue his studies in painting.

In 1934, he had joined the Government School of Arts and Crafts in Chennai. He took his formal training in visual arts under the guidance of D.P. Roy Choudhary. In 1940, he had received his diploma and further he joined the Government School of Arts and Crafts as a teacher. Around 1944, Panikar had founded the Progressive Painters’ Association in Chennai.

K.C.S. Paniker’s career as a painter moved through three distinct phases. His first phase consists his early paintings, in water colors, depicted the landscapes of
rural Kerala. In the second phase, he had worked in the domain of figurative compositions that covers the wide array of themes related to human life. In his third and final phase he had created a vocabulary of his abstract compositions inspired from words, symbols and motifs of Malyali tantric scriptures and metaphysics. But here, in present context, researcher had only discus and evaluate his paintings of his final phase of abstract compositions, with little overview of his earlier works.

Fig.6.27. Landscape, K.C.S Panikar, 1943

Fig.6.28. Landscape, K.C.S Panikar

In 1930s, and 40s, he usually paints landscapes in watercolours, depicting the rural picturesque of Kerala. (Fig.6.27, 6.28, 6.29) The landscapes of Kerala emerge on his canvas from the memory of his childhood days that he spent in Kerala. Panikar sensitively absorbed and depicted the essence of the land and the life of the
Kerala in his passionate brush strokes. The delight he took in it comes up in the play of his almost impressionistic treatment of colour. His impulsive washes in the water colours had created an interest in the picture space. These landscapes were realistic representations with personalized brush strokes, which carried features of the ‘abstraction’. “He made his departure in the landscape, the genre he used extensively for developing his arguments. Rather than solidify the free space with straight line structure of perspective or with regular blocks of colours, he made it into a fluid thing held up with a distribution of highly accented, broken, and curling lines. The irregular edges of colours that one gets as bonus when working in watercolours, a medium which Paniker excelled, might have suggested to him this very unconventional possibility of abstraction.”35

In the mid fifties, he travelled widely in Europe and exhibited his works in London and Paris. His passion and concern for Indian art grew deeper as he came to see the works of European masters. In that time, Panicker had begun to discover his own formalistic intentions and stylistic interventions in comparison with Indian fresco and bronze traditions. “His Western excursion affected him like it affected most Indian artists of any individuality; it threw him back on himself, it was as if across the seas a strange longing for his land caught him in the pit of his stomach. On his return he became a strong ‘indigenist,' though not in the traditionalist sense.”36 “His own love and study of the masters of European art had opened up for
him the technique, vision and spirit of that great tradition, and yet, his own requirements whetted by his study of European experience make him look away and turn to entirely different sources. The spirit of unknown masters that had been breathed into the master works of our art: Khajuraho, Mahabalipuram, Konarak, moved him powerfully.  

Around mid-fifties, he started his experimentation with figurative style of painting. His preoccupations with the Ajanta paintings started in early fifties and led him to the sculptures of the Chola period. The paintings of this period such as ‘Blessed are the Peace Makers,’ the ‘Pregnancy Ward' series, ‘Malabar Peasant,' and ‘The life of Buddha' are really significant. And with his Garden series, he had developed a expressionistic style of painting with greater emphasize on linearity and luminous sense of color. “In the "Garden" series of pictures, Paniker brought together, in a convincing personal style, the knowledge, ability and experience of a very mature painter and the innocence of an unspoiled artist; the profundity of one who can look far and beyond the passion that will not let the present depart. With these pictures, the innocence and experience grew past the warm security of his emotion and he turned larger than life.”

Later in the late fifties, K.C.S.Panikar turned towards abstraction in his search to develop a rational style of painting. As Geeta Doctor wrote “…therefore, it was not in imitation of western artists trying to move away from realism, through compulsions of their own, but in response to much more subtle forces that had come to the surface of his artistic imagination. His engagement with what could be called an alternate reality was to take him from his Garden series, where the images are rendered in an energetic buoyant line, full of restless strokes of the brush, through the Christ series, in which he stretched the rigid form to its limits and finally broke through it, with his image of Subrahmanya. In time, he was to relinquish all the attempts at conveying a plastic reality to arrive at the series known as Words and Symbols. He had managed to leave everything out to its barest essence. There was nothing to distract the viewer, neither colour, nor form, nor line, nor figure, nor even words in the strict sense of the term. He had abstracted his experience in the most austerely elegant and yet detached manner, making the leap from the personal to the eternal.”
In search of his indigenous expression, Paniker had undergone a deep research into the various forms of calligraphy and to the origins of the visual language of his own environment. As part of his search for a new pictorial style, Paniker studied the works of Paul Klee and Jamini Roy, observed scribbles of children, and learned the illustrated writings of Malyali 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. In 1963, he had painted The Fruit Seller (Fig.6.30), in which he introduced the elements of calligraphy and figures with linear drawing with the minimal use of colours in the picture space. This painting was the significant in the context of Panikar’s new phase in painting.

Around 1963, Panikar developed a new abstract vocabulary in his works of ‘Words and Symbols’. (Fig. 6.31, 6.32, 6.33) Paniker was highly inspired from the mathematical tables and Indian horoscopes. As Panikar himself wrote "...My work of the Words and Symbols series, started in 1963, using mathematical symbols, Arabic figures and the Roman script, helped me create an atmosphere of new picture making which I seemed to need very much.....In the course of time when my symbols changed I found the Malayalam script more congenial.......The scripts are not intended to be read. To make them illegible I introduce strange shapes and characters in between the groups of letters. The symbols and diagrams, the tabular columns etc. have no meaning whatsoever other than their visual aspect and images born out of association of ideas".40

Fig.6.32. Words & Symbols, K.C.S.Panikar, 1965
Panikar’s paintings of ‘Words and Symbols’ series (Fig. 6.33, 6.35, 6.36, 6.37) was really significant development in his artistic journey. Panikar had used the signs, symbols and the scripts from the ancient hand written scriptures in his compositions. He painted his compositions in the thin layer of colours much like his early watercolours. “The illusion of space, of light and colour in his early watercolours, the emotion and pain of his figures and groups he dispels as he searches in these great pictures for the "word" that can inwardly assure and give peace.” 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 visualised the wide arrays of forms of life coming together in a design of sublime and mystery.
Another important aspect about his ‘words and symbols’ (Fig. 6.34) was the emphasis on scripts from Malyali scriptures and Tantric symbols and tabular forms which constitute his compositions. His images, coloring, and style show the influence of the occult and the Tantric ritual arts of Kerala. Panikar want to create a style of painting which had its roots in indigenous sources. As Panikar wrote “Every letter in the written word has a highly evolved form, a form attained from through usage and guided by man’s racial or national sense of seeing and shaping, the rhythm in line following the laws of continuity and free manual rhythm of action. Man has been writing from centuries; he has continually sought to make his writing beautiful and yet, in practice, he is most un-selfconscious, with the result that each man’s writing announces his own true character and personality. What more suitable medium can one invent for making pictures than the written words? The Chinese and the Japanese have demonstrated it to the satisfaction of the world. In India, the Tantric traditions enjoins the use of the written word, symbols, figures and that most marvelous of all inventions, the tabular column for picture making.”

Paniker emphasizes on the linear drawing in his compositions. Almost his whole painting was made out of linear rhythmic forms. “The line is almost everything in Panikar’s later work, and it is of an intense and searching nature.” His lines were embodied with some images, which is also a problematic issue in his composition in the context of abstraction. Josef James wrote “This series of pictures make it reasonable to believe that there exists a drawing which can do away with the
image completely and yet have an enormous capacity for detail. If that is a possibility, Panikar goes on to argue, it would be possible to form with that kind of drawing, bodies that can have no delineation, no mass and no temporal being; and that is, to introduce a whole class of beings one has no familiarity with or previous knowledge of art. Pranabaranjan Ray had a different view about that as he wrote “The calligraphic writings, together with geometrical symbols, sometimes interspersed with linear indicators of figural images, formed grand dynamic designs of great value, in which all distinctions between mark making, sign forming, image conceiving and representing tended to make all divisions between abstraction and empathy irrelevant.” Panikar painted such images as mere a part of the formal design of his compositions, completely detached from its meaning.

Fig.6.36 Words & Symbols, K.C.S.Panikar, 1970

In 1966, Panikar had the founded of Cholamandal, an artist's village was the 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. In this artist's community, art and craft co-existed in a mutual give and take. 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.

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.”47

![Fig.6.37. Words & Symbols, K.C.S.Panikar](image)
In 70’s Paniker had come to his last phase of his ‘Words and Symbols’ series (Fig. 6.39, 6.40). His canvases emerge in dark flat backgrounds with crowded scripts and symbols showed a certain transformation in his stylistic interventions. And later, 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.

In this period, Paniker painted with thin layers of paint, especially in the last phase of his creative painting. In all paintings of the ‘Words and Symbol’ series, he had deconstructed the European method of easel painting practice by using transparent layers and delicate linear images with a self-induced calligraphy like imagery. “Paniker’s lasting contribution to modernist art has been this project of holistic integration of the primordial with the most sophisticated. Thus was born an “abstract art” which was neither born out of post-Renaissance rationalism nor out of post-industrial revolution triumphalism.”

Fig.6.38. Words & Symbols, K.C.S.Panikar
The modern art movement in South India is credited to K.C.S. Panicker for many reasons. His role as an artist, who synthesized the vocabulary of modernist language of art by addressing issues of indigenous, has always been a subject of research. His contributions as a teacher who led a generation of artists and as the founder of Cholamandal artist’s village in Chennai were crucial in tracing the South India in the modern art movement in India.
Ram Kumar

Ram Kumar was born in a Punjabi Khatri family at Shimla in 1924. His father Nanad Kumar Verma belonged to the Patiala and worked as an officer in the Indian Government. Whereas his mother belongs to a rich family of Delhi based merchants. He was the fifth child among his eight siblings. One of his brothers is one of India's leading writers Nirmal Verma. The family was the typical middle-class family in which “The life of the family centered around the mother.” From his graduation days Ram Kumar had a great interest in the Hindi literature. He usually read books of short stories and novels, which were bring by her elder sister. Later, he had completed his post-graduation in economics from St. Stephen’s College, affiliated to Delhi University. In this period he also had a fascination towards the music, which also shows that he had a great sensibility towards varied art forms and he was constantly struggling with the suitable medium for his expression. He had started writing short stories, which later published in various literary magazine including ‘Hans’ and ‘Prateek’.

Ram Kumar’s interest arose in painting when he came across a painting exhibition at ‘Sharda Ukil Art School’ at Connaught place in New Delhi. To fulfill his urge to study painting he got admitted the evening classes at Sharda Ukil School of Art in 1943, where he got his formal training in painting under the guidance of Shiloz Mookherjea. During this time he has not had a deep understanding of Indian painting, but his interest was to learn the different techniques of paintings. “Ram Kumar was for a time fascinated by the ornamental images and dexterous techniques, even perhaps the sentiments, of his Bengali teachers and found occasion to learn something of all this in his holidays when he could attend the morning classes in ‘Indian style’ painting. His preferences and ideas about art were obviously unformulated at this stage.”

Around 1948, he joined the ‘Delhi Shilpi Chakra’ a group of Delhi based artists and regularly started exhibiting his works in various group shows. During this period he also came into the contact with many significant artists of that time including B.C.Sanyal, Kanwal Krishan, Harkrishan Lall, Prannath Mago and the Progressives. He also becomes friend of S.H.Raza, with whom he also visited to
Bombay. “Ram Kumar was now among those young artist who recognized clearly that Indian art had to be rescued from the hopelessly sentimental creed into which it had fallen in the name of ‘Indianness’.”

His passionate interest in art took him to Paris. In that period Paris was considered as a major center for art. Later in the early fifties, Kumar left for Paris to study art. “The beautiful and cosmopolitan city of Paris effected a swift, optimistic change in Ram Kumar’s personality. Living in an apartment in Cite Universite he found himself in a lively and intellectual milieu.” He enjoyed the vibrancy of the city and remained there for almost three years. He learned French language and imbibed the aesthetic and elegance of the environment. First year he study under the Andre Lhote and later joined the Fernand Leger’s classes. “Leger’s ideology had given him a specific visionary perspective: he was able to project the sense of community among ordinary folk as a possibility of unalienated activity in a post-industrial society. He had also wrested from his ideology the freedom of developing an appropriate language, something one can say of very few Marxist painters…. Although Ram Kumar admired Leger, he drew very little from the master; and this
can only be regretted. Leger on his part, criticized him for too literal a treatment of the subject-matter, suggesting that in becoming illustrative he only succeeded in blunting his message.”

His Paris experience was important to his artistic sensibility and growth. It provides him an opportunity to see the works of various legendary artists of Europe including Matisse, Picasso and Magdiliani. He carried his past with him, not forgetting his Indian roots or his commitment to the working class. He also became the member of the Communist party and came into contact with noteworthy intellectuals like Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon and Roger Garaudy.

Ram Kumar started his journey in art field as a figurative painter. He was influenced by the solitude of the urban society, which is the major theme of his paintings of the early period. “As a young artist, Ram Kumar was captivated by, or rather obsessed with, the human face because of the ease and intensity with which it registers the drama of life. The sad, desperate, lonely hopeless or lost faces, which fill the canvases of his early period, render with pathos his view of human condition.” Although, most of his painting during this period was figurative but his forms are not realistic. The structure of the figures in his composition is highly simplified with subdued colours. In his compositions “the figure are dealt in an aplastic pseudo-modeling obtained by the use of light and shade, which does not refer to structure of the human form. The minimum delineation, through in strong lines, of the human figure and use of perspective shows his interest in simplification of formal structure.” Some of his significant paintings of this period were the ‘Sad Town’, ‘Hidden Sorrows’ and ‘Vagabond’.

Around the late fifties, figure began to disappear from his cityscapes and landscapes. He made a transformation from figurative to abstract art in a certain period of time. (Fig. 6.42, 6.43) “Ram Kumar never succumbed at any time to easy temptation of using the ready-made symbols to represent his search for what he felt to be true of the time. The Utopian euphoria of his Paris days did not prevent him from seeing that; ‘lower depths’ of human solitude. At the same time, while rejecting the chaff of false collectivities, he preserved the grain of an insight into the ‘large gradually meaningful whole’, which after a long lapse of time, illuminated his
nature of landscapes.” In his paintings of later figurative period, certain abstract architectural qualities began to dominate in his composition. The landscapes that were the background in his figurative paintings emerge as the subject matter of his compositions. “The moment Ram Kumar eliminated the figure, he changed his structural strategy. First of all the eye level, which had usually been grounded low and the perspective therefore tilted on and away from the viewer was brought level. The foreground was often left unworked, the middle stance merged with the background. Correspondingly, the landscape was arranged certainly, often just a simple configuration of free-floating forms.”
“Land, map, vista: Ram Kumar approaches the expanse of the visible world in various provisional forms…. Neither neutral observer nor manic enthusiast, he is a refined amorist of the landscape. If his picture surface can withdraw into a willful abstraction, it can also resolve itself into a conciliatory gesture and step across the threshold of realistic representation.”58 He paints fully abstract works after his visit to Greece. He was highly inspired by the beauty of the Greece landscape. He also had painted some abstract landscape inspired by the beauty and solitude of the hill town ‘Sanjoli’ which is situated nearside the Shimla.

In 1959, He had visited to Benaras which is considered as a sacred and oldest inhabited city. His visit to Benaras was very important for him for his development in painting. As he said “Benaras is important for me both as an artist and as a human being, the first paintings came at a point when I wanted to develop elements in figurative painting and go beyond it, my first visit to the city invoked an emotional reaction as it had peculiar associations. But such romantic ideas were dispelled when I came face to face with reality. There was so much pain and sorrow of humanity. As an artist it became a challenge to portray this agony and suffering, its intensity required the use of symbolic motifs, so my Benaras is of a representative sort.”59

Fig.6.44. Varanasi, Ram Kumar, 1965
The city of Benaras was both a visual and psychological experience for him. It was a city where he came to know that life and death had no meaning itself. “The city of Benaras, we know of course, is teeming with people, and they are too visible; on the streets, on the steps of ghats, knee-deep in water, and in the boats which take you from the shore to shore. It is, moreover a city of myriad sounds - high-pitched noises and melodious chants. Ram Kumar eliminated all this and left the city desolate.”\textsuperscript{60} In his abstract landscapes of Benaras, his intention was to capture the essence of the city rather than to the objective reality. “The Benaras paintings seem to be the end product of a process of a struggle, till the artist has distilled the very essence; there is no symbolism to convey a literal message, there are no caricatural twists to emphasizes ‘meaning’…… and what we are left with are only twisted, entangling lines emerging out of palpitating colour. And it is these lines and colours which seem to have assimilated into themselves all the pathos, the sufferings, the vast and utter emptiness of the city and its and its captives, and they vibrate and trot in the aura of the artists compassion.”\textsuperscript{61}(Fig.6.44, 6.45, 6.46, 6.47)
Ram Kumar’s landscapes had a close affinity with nature, but the way he treats nature in his abstract landscape is a very distinct. His abstractions in oil reveal an artist who possesses a mystic consciousness. “In Ram's recent work, the presence of the living force of nature, man and landscape, has come to be expressed more obliquely, as a mystique… the indefinable but concrete feel of the living landscape now expresses the painter's sensibility.”62 He did not purge all the traces of the nature completely from his compositions. “His ‘abstractions’ are not the flights into ‘unknown’, but like a shifting beam of light they move, passing through the entire space of the painting, from one segment of reality to another, uncovering the hidden relations, between the sky, the rock, the river. The sacred resides not in the objects
depicted, but in the relations discovered." His paintings emerge as a ground plan of city in which forms reduced to a pattern of square-like shapes. “Ram took a rather expansive view of nature, a kind of bird’s eye view. These prospects emerged concurrently with the ‘reformed’, more structure–based, imagery – the sublimated landscapes which were cityscapes” (Fig.6.48 to 6.53)

Fig.6.48. Benaras, Ram Kumar, 1965. Fig.6.49. Varanasi, Ram Kumar, 1966

He took inspiration from the nature and transforms it in a much personal language. In his abstract works, an unseen imagery has been developed in a delicate and ingenious manner. From the ingeniousness of his experiences, a different kind of visual language has emerged. “The way he paints landscapes it becomes obvious that he is not painting worldly objects; he is, in fact, painting his own inner expression of the object. The landscapes he has painted are largely based on his creative imagination. These scenes go beyond the visible reality, get imbued with imagination and then reappear on his canvas. The geometry of these paintings, their opacity represents the symbolic projection of his inner self. Similarly, the structure of his paintings makes them the works of a different world. This different world is his own inner world which is dense and complex and which has many hues.”
Ram Kumar’s abstraction progress from one idea of structure, colour, light and surface to another, his trajectory encompasses a tremendous range of physical and poetic essence. “The physical world, that is land-forms, rocks, hills, houses, birds, stretches on water, sky and clouds—nature true in its totality with the varied physiognomy—seems to increasingly engage him. His landscapes, real (such as
Varanasi) or imaginary, offers a scope for form–structure manipulation where in the subject and the style mutually support each other.” The poetic poignancy for the atmosphere brings an elevation, a structure of light and air in the composition. (Fig.6.50, 6.51)

Texture in his paintings, is also a significant concern in formation of his compositions. In his Benaras series, he started to work with knife and spatula. His bold strokes of spatula create a surface tension in the formation of picture space, which seem to be a tangible entity in his composition. He used the almost monochromatic tone of the brown, grey and olive green in his composition in his first abstract phase. “This colour range differs widely from the pale, bright, vivid
lucidity of de Stael’s colours and sumptuous variations of it by several abstract painters of the School of Paris. It corresponds more nearly to the Cubist whose influence on him we have already noted. Of the Cubists it was Braque he had always admired – with his subdued tonality, his subtle surfaces of paint, his most discreet and ordered world of images.\textsuperscript{67}

In late sixties, Ram Kumar develops a gestural approach in his paintings, but not in manner of Abstract Expressionists. “Ram Kumar's paintings are not preconceived but entirely logical. They are moreover, additive. The painting emerges from a systematic build-up of strokes and gestures. His identification with the French version of abstract Expressionism only confirms that reliance is less on sheer spontaneity and more on discretion and design.”\textsuperscript{68} (Fig.6.54)

He expands his abstraction by emphasizing the gesture of the brush strokes and reduction of the natural objects. “The process of ‘gestural’ painting takes the artist to a passive state of mind, a state in which he, with the medium of his brush, paints a silent conversation. For Ram Kumar, the inner reality is the real thing and he takes the path of abstraction to highlight it. This, of course, does not mean that Ram Kumar's art is cut off from reality. He confronts a vast unknown reality. It is a theological turn that seeks a different kind of autonomy.”\textsuperscript{69}
Most significant aspect about this phase was the greater change in the range of his colours. Whereas, in his earlier abstract landscapes he used browns and grays, were replaced by more sophisticated tones of bright yellow with golden ochre and ultramarine blue. Structure and the surface of his paintings had also changed in this phase. He usually paints a small area with the accomplished layers of paint and scrap down the large area of the canvas with the knife. Ram Kumar produced the grayed yet luminous, appearance of his paintings by draining most of the oil from the pigments. The resulting subliminal effects of a kind of dim, afterimage were achieved on the surface of painting by thin turpentine washes. (Fig. 5.54, 6.55)

Fig. 6.55. Laddakh, Ram Kumar, 1978

In mid-seventies, after his visit to Kashmir he had painted a series of work on the landscapes of Laddakh. (Fig. 6.55) His abstract landscapes of Laddakh are more like a journey into space and infinity. His gesture of sweeping brush strokes becomes more evident in these abstract compositions. His used the varied tones of gray, black and white, which makes his compositions more austere. As he wrote in his notebook that “Laddakh-barren and rugged. No vegetation, grey mountain ranges and black rock like bas-reliefs jutting out of them and white monasteries.....the landscape haunted me for quite some time. Later when I tried to paint my impression on canvas, I could not imagine any color to be used. Even blue sky and crystal blue water of the Indus had to be in black and white. The eternal silence of a wasted, barren earth which refused to compromise with man could not be visualized in any
other color except grey and white and black ...”70 After Laddakh series, the beauty of the Kumaon and Shivalik Hills captivated him to paint. He frequently retreats to Andretta, a small hill town in Himachal Pradesh to paint as he enjoys the solitude of the mountains. (Fig.6.56, 6.57)

In the nineties, he came back with his new series of works on Benaras. The city always inspired him in many ways visibly and philosophically. In his new landscapes, city structure began to reappear with the river, and the ghats of Benaras. He used Sienna, Browns, Umbers, and Blues with their bright hues. He usually had started work in Acrylic colours, which gives him more freedom to his expression. The application of thick colours with palette knife using bold strokes is mesmerizing. The layering of colour speaks of alienation, violence and destruction. Later landscapes have an aura of meditative serenity and peace in his compositions. The true subject of Ram Kumar’s art, perhaps, is the landscape as Beloved. In responding to the palpable eroticism of graze and blur, the stippling and studding of textures across these painted surfaces, we share his manifest rapture, his sense of stepping outside himself to attain communion with the Beloved.”71

Ram Kumar still continued his painting practice on the theme of abstract landscapes. Abstract art is an art form which is created through a mental debate with the artist's experiences and brought to life with line and colour. By communicating their abstract splendor the artist has added new vistas to the viewer's imagination.
However, Ram Kumar has always remained firm on his ground and never goes back to the figurative painting throughout of his life. “For Ram Kumar “The making, the breaking, the stillness in between – creation, preservation and destruction, the elemental triune of Indian philosophy; the cycle of his work, the cycle of life.”}\(^\text{72}\)
V.S. Gaitonde

V.S. Gaitonde was one of the prominent exponents of abstract trend in modern Indian art. He was born 1924 in a conservative family in Mhasya town in Nagpur at Maharashtra. Around 1930, his family shifted to Bombay, where his father had began to work as accountant at Majestic theatre. His father was a hardworking man who works in three shifts to bear the responsibility of his family. From his boyhood days Gaitonde had a strong interest in painting and he wanted go to J.J. School of Art for his academic studies.

In 1943, against the will of his father, he got admission in the J.J. School of Art, Bombay. At college, the environment was encouraging for him. He was introduced to a new world of colours, which comprised of thousands of books, people in the art world and initially helped his to find his own expression. “In the Western region, the J.J. School of Art was the only institution traditionally concerned with the task of teaching art. In the curriculum, academism no doubt played its part but the atmosphere was not wholly discouraging for those who tried to see new horizons. Gaitonde himself believes that some of the academic training which he received in the school positively benefited him. It taught him orthodox draughtsman ship, a discipline essential even for non-objective artists.”

At J.J School, J.Ahiwasi was the teacher and mentor for Gaitonde. It was to him that he attributes his pictorial understanding and a fine appreciation of colour, line and form as essential elements of an artwork. He was belonged to Mathura and appointed to teach miniature paintings to the students at J.J. Ahiwasi has not had a direct influence on his work, his teachings and guidance helped him to understand the basic essence of art and poetry.

In 1947, India had got independence from the colonial rule. That was the time when Bombay was emerging as a new centre of art in India. In the same year Progressive Artist Group had emerged as a new guiding force for young artists. Souza, Raza, Ara, Husian, Gade and Bakre were the founding members of the group. At that time Gaitonde was also involved with group’s activities and discussions, but he was not the part of the group. Later in 1948, he received his diploma from the J.J.School of Art, Bombay and joined the Progressives. In the
same year, he joined the J.J. School of Art as Assistance Lecturer with S.B. Palsikar and Laxman Pai. He quit from the college after a period of one and half year, as he had found that the job is not suited to his temperament.

In his initial years he was a figurative artist, but he in 1950’s he turned towards semi-abstract landscape painting. He was strongly influenced by the paintings of Paul Klee. (Fig.6.60, 6.61) “He must have been exposed to reproductions of Paul Klee and Rouault but it will be some time before he embraces Klee with immense eagerness. He continues to toy with the human figure and tackles it in slightly differing manners with a geometrical impulse guiding him.”74

His small works emphasize on textural surface; usually painted in bright monochromatic colours. As he wrote “Something in (Klee’s) use of the line excited me; I gradually came to identify myself in his work. I liked Klee’s imagination and fantasy….”75 Gaitonde has not had any space to paint large canvas at home, so he often painted on small canvases and paper, which also bring his interest in the paintings of Klee. That was a struggling period for Gaitonde, but somehow, he manage to paint continuously and regularly exhibited his works in various exhibitions.
In 1956, he also joined the Bombay group, which was formed by some of his colleagues of ‘PAG’ and other significant artists of that time including K.K. Hebbar, Shivax Chavda, and Baburo Sadwelkar. The group was short-lived and disintegrated after one or two exhibitions. Gaitonde remained committed to a fairly solitary vision even within artist’s collectives. As Nadkarni wrote “The central characteristic of Gaitonde's artistic personality, it must be understood, is that he likes to stand alone. He is not an artist for groups. And so I suggest that his alliances in his early youth have no specific significance in relation not only to his later growth but also to his innate artistic being. This independent-mindedness was accompanied by a firm belief in his identity as a painter. And because of
firmness, Gaitonde isolated himself very early in his career from everything in his environment which he considered irrelevant to this identity as a painter. Gaitonde's growth over the years is marked by an increasing inwardness and a meticulous and watchful consolidation of this identity. His ‘Prayer before Birth’ is significant painting of this period, which he exhibited in the Bombay Group exhibition.

In his formative years of his career, he was continuously experimenting with his paintings. He emphasized on the textural surface in his compositions, which he achieves through a slow and painstaking process. (Fig.6.62 to 6.66) “The creation of texture in an unconventional way, the use of thick lugubrious pigment, the evocation of light and, finally, the subtle balancing of the image on canvas as if it were undulating on water arid gradually surfacing in the light—all these are attainments of a time when the individual canvases themselves may not be far too distinctive. The need to establish a meaningful relationship between line and painted surface remains with Gaitonde for quite some time—before his art takes the first turn towards the period of his major achievement.”

In 1957, he had won the award of one lakh yen on his painting entitled ‘The Bird’ and an Egg’ at Young Asian Artist Exhibition held in Tokyo. Prize money was a great financial help for him. Around 1958, Bhulabhai Memorial institute was
established and soon became the hub of all sort of art activities in Bombay. Ravi Shankar’s school of music, Alkazi Theatre Unit of drama had started in the institute. Various artists including M.F.Husain, Prafulla Dhanukar, Akbar Padamsee, Nasreen Mohammedi and Piloo Pochkhanawala had taken their studio space in the institute. Gaitonde also had managed to share the studio space of Prafulla Dhanukar. “Life at the Bhulabhai Memorial Institute no doubt has an important place in. Gaitonde's formative since he has allowed himself to be exposed to music, to the theatre and cinema and to literature and the other arts in a fastidious manner. Over the years, one has found Gaitonde maintaining that fine balance between the enriching of the solitary sensibility and the commerce of the mundane world which traffics along in its own insensitive manner. I venture to say that Gaitonde would not have been a painter worth taking seriously if there had been no tension, no threat of thunder and lightning, held poised between these two extremities. It is this which has saved Gaitonde from using his canvas to project some pseudo-philosophical concepts.”

Gaitonde developed his own language of his forms and monochromatic colours on almost flat surfaces of his abstract landscapes. (Fig.6.67, 6.68) He had
painted his abstract compositions as landscapes of space. He creates the unusual textural surface in his compositions by the use of roller. “Beautifully orchestrated these paintings were suggestive of a world view in which the seasons, night and day, the prospect of sea and the sky were all conceived as symphonic whole, each detail or small motif functioning like a movement or a variation of the theme. The volumes of colours carried and contained alert, live formations, which together activated and enlivened the entire colour field.”

Gaitonde adhered to abstraction as the purest form of painting. As he said in a 1964 interview with the artist S. G. Vasudev “My entire outlook changed when I came to know that the Chinese have no epics to boast of -- for the simple reason that epics cover a long period of time and it is basically wrong to say, for instance, that any age can be heroic...Any abstract feeling -- love, courage, etc -- can be valid only for a given moment. One is not in love eternally, even if the feeling is there. The ecstasy of the moment cannot be stretched over a long period.”

In 1964-65, he was awarded the Rockefeller Fellowship to work and travel across Europe and U.S. At that time “Gaitonde has already exposed himself to a highly sophisticated intellectual routine. He was both himself a mature painter and was in a receptive mood. He absorbed this experience with a detachment characteristic of his attitude to life and art. What he saw did not create any trauma..."
for him: on the other hand, he felt confident of the road he had already taken and one may say, itching to get back to work.\textsuperscript{81} He had got opportunity to see the works of many significant artists associated with the abstract expressionism. He also saw the paintings of Marc Rothko, whom he always admired. He also visited to Boston, Chicago and San Francisco. In his own painting, he moved from the figurative forms of his early works to abstract art. His search for a non-representational style of expression was not influenced from American abstract expressionism.

In his journey back to India, he also went to Japan, where he visited to the Zen temple and Gardens. He was highly influenced from the philosophy of Zen. He also acknowledged the meditative influence of Zen philosophy on his painting which organized paint, texture and seemingly abstract form on canvas in a manner that seemed to liberate rather than hold the evocations of paint. “He turned to mysticism because of his deep and abiding association with Zen philosophy. While he learnt elements of artistic structure from Paul Klee, he imbibed the quality of instant feeling from Zen philosophy.”\textsuperscript{82} (Fig.6.69, 6.70)
Gaitonde continuously had studied and made experiments with the nature of colours, which inspired him to capture the immediate emotions in his paintings through the colours. “He learnt how inner feelings could be released through manipulation of colours. That is why we find free flow of inner feelings and experiences in his paintings. He tried to give expression to conceptual representation of the immediate experiences in his painting but his process of work was not that Immediate: Painting for him was a deliberate construction and that is why he could not have painted his inner experiences without a fair degree of deliberation.”

He regularly made long and silent conservation with his canvases as Priya Karunakar wrote “The painter has arrived, in one sense of the word. It has not been easy. Sometime he sits surrounded by his canvases and looks at them. To him this is a just as important as painting itself.”

Around 1968, Gaitonde had shifted from the Bombay and settled in Delhi. That was the time; Gaitonde had gone through an extended period of experimentation in developing his personal style of expression. He had used both palette knife and roller in his compositions. Gaitonde’s greatest achievement was his unparalleled ingenuity to his medium. His paintings correspond to a whimsical fantasy of forms and colors, which can evoked the emotions among the viewers. His paintings “are sensuous. Each is unified by the single colour. The colour glows; it becomes transparent; it clots. It is this play of pigment, as it is absorbed physically into the canvas, that directs the eye. Texture is structure. How he achieves this texture is the secret of the Gaitonde style. The rest is simple.”

The pigment is rolled and manipulated with the ease and simple manner. His expressionistic strokes inscribe calligraphic notations on the surface. He mastered the art of layering the pigment and overlapping it with his gestures.

Gaitonde mostly painted the huge planar surfaces and delicate layers of paint on the canvas. He evokes the light through the dense colouring of the canvas. “Gaitonde paints with a full consciousness of the role that light would play in the interaction of colours on his canvas. Sometimes this appears to work as an obsession. At least when one now looks at Gaitonde canvases of the early non-
objective phase they seem to be more explicit than they should be. Perhaps, that elusive moment of revelation had not struck him. To achieve something on the physical plane, with paint and texture and light, and simultaneously to sound something imperceptible beyond it was some time before he was to realise automatically the significance of such a process.”

Fig.6.71. Untitled, V.S.Gaitonde, 1972.                                     Fig.6.72. Untitled, V.S.Gaitonde, 1972

In the early seventies, Gaitonde had started new experiments with the textural surface in his compositions. (Fig.6.71, 6.72) In this phase, while painting first he achieved the a pattern of texture on the surface of the painting and then he started painting with colours. In late seventies, he develops more complex structure of form, colours and texture on the canvas. His paintings mostly in large size format depicted the organic forms, floating in water. “Each canvas is a vast, translucent, pool of paint, a reminder that the materials available to the artists themselves surrender the maximum of values… The canvas looks like an ocean; to carry the simile further, it is as if we are looking down on the mildly lapping waters of the sea near a pier and. in the half light, gazing at things surfacing or floating in the water. The motifs in these canvases literally surface in the pool of paint, and they convey a variety of associations.” (Fig.6.73)
In the eighties, his art works becomes more persuasive and seductive. He used the mystical motifs and hieroglyphs in his paintings, which had its roots in Zen philosophy. (Fig.6.74 to 6.78) “Gaitonde was already steeped in Japanese motifs long before his interest in Zen began to feature in his creative impulses. His sketches and drawings are full of exercises in this direction, and one admires not only the architectonics of these hieroglyphic designs but also their genuineness. Such patterns are now meaningfully deployed in the paintings. They also perform a stylistic function by organizing the formal tensions in the available space and by quietly dramatizing the interplay of light, texture and space.”

This was his more mature period, in which he creates a distinction by his style of painting. His compositions constitute multiple layers of colours, literally constructed on the surface, in which texture becomes the part of the composition. His range of colours defies specificity in terms of reds or mauves, ochres or yellows, blues and purples, white or pale. His colors beckon the viewers as Priya Karunakar wrote “Gai continues to explore the luminosities and densities of colours. As a result he returns his hold on the relationship between colour and the strong psychometric pull it has on the viewer”
Gaitonde’s process of creation, largely conditions the nature and character of his works. His work privilege the act of art making, of the painter’s body in action over time. The product of that activity is his visual field of colours. His negation of objective reality was aimed at negotiating only with his tools and techniques to create purely non-objective forms, in which he assimilate everything together without having to think on any experiences. The reality for Gaitonde was his presence in the ‘immediate moment’, where he initiates his journey with a state of consciousness, nature and silence within. “His art conveys instant feelings which are entirely his own. In his use of abstractions, Gaitonde was searching for eternity which he could have painted on his canvas. But this eternity was not absolute in itself; it was just an eternity of his momentary perceptions and experiences that he was exposing through abstraction.”

The individuality of Gaitonde’s spatial vision and secretive character of his iconography made the artist as a medium for cosmic truths. Gaitonde’s vision remains focused on systematic exploration of technique and structure. “The role of Zen in Gaitonde's art is likely to be exaggerated. He is not the type of painter to wait for either, and emotional influence or a philosophy to propel him. If we study
Gaitonde's work over the past three decades or so, it is not difficult to detect a certain logicality in the direction taken by his art. It was inexorably moving towards a state of contemplation. It was not that he discovered Zen but that there was an inevitable meeting between a way of thinking and a mind continuously exploring its relationship with the external world.”^91

For Gaitonde, art is a process, complete in itself and in exploring his inner spaces and ephemeral realities it helps him move towards himself. “As an artist, Gaitonde inhabited a strange and mysterious world of his inner feelings - A world that was in a perpetual denial mode because that was the condition of abstraction. His abstractions emerged out of the dark recesses of denial that was a part of his inner world. He was an ascetic painter who embarked on a journey of silence. In this particular trait, he was very close to Ram Kumar. Silence provided him the space that he used to paint - fully knowing that it cannot be captured in a work of art.”^92 Gaitonde’s floating forms and the tactile translucency of paint that inhabited space with apparently random interest were the strength of his long search for inner expression.
Jagdish Swaminathan

Jagdish Swaminathan was born in 1928 at Sanjoli in Shimla. He got his early education at the Shimla, where his father was working as personal assistant to a British officer. From his childhood he had great fascination for painting and he usually makes portraits of national leaders and painting landscapes. In 1942, after completing his matriculation from Shimla, he joined the pre-medical course in Hindu College in Delhi. But he left the course uncompleted and ran away to Calcutta. Later he wrote “I could draw a cockroach much better than dissect one.” In Calcutta, he did varied odd jobs to earn his living. After a short span of time, he came back to Delhi and joined the Congress Socialist Party and also appointed sub-editor of a Hindi short story magazine, and subsequently as an editor of a Hindi magazine ‘Mazdoor Awaz’. In 1948, he had joined the Communist Party of India and started working on Youth front, but in mid-fifties he started getting disillusioned “J. Swaminathan was a unique artist of his time. Being a journalist, an intellectual and philosopher besides being a painter, he developed an artistic persona different from others. Initially, he was under the sway of Marxism, but with a passage of time, he moved towards idealism”

Around 1955, he had joined the evening classes in the art department of the Delhi Polytechnic, where he got his formal training in art under the guidance of Sailoz Mukherjee and Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal. However his art study didn't last long as he couldn't manage the stress of working during the day, together with the art classes. But he never stop painting and started working at home as he wrote “…both Sailoz Babu and Dhanraj Bhagat the sculptor told me that I need not hankering for diploma and who could stop you from painting my boy? So I used to work during the day as a translator for a meager wage, and to paint at night, and paint like the very devil indeed.”

In 1957, he had got admission at Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in Poland. At Warsaw, he was trained as print-maker under the guidance of Morzczak and Kulisciwicz, both were great teacher as well as printmaker. Although he had not completed his studies there, and came back to India. After coming back to India, he had turned himself to a fulltime artist. At that time Swaminathan’s paintings were
dominated by the prehistoric totemic signs language. He also actively involved with the activities of Delhi Shilp Chakra. He regularly participated in the group exhibitions organized by the Chakra. In 1960, he did his first major exhibition, displaying his graphic prints and oil paintings, along with artists P.K. Razadan and N. Dixit.

In the late 1950s or early 1960s, Swaminathan, first turned to the symbology of ancient cave paintings and indigenous Indian art forms in an attempt to create a new language for modern Indian art, a quest, which inspire him to work throughout his life. Usually these paintings were mostly painted in dark mystic colours. (Fig.6.79) Swaminathan's compositions It is important to note that “Swaminathan’s early paintings of the fifties seemed therapeutic in intent, as means for liberating them from their cultural presuppositions and to paint in a manner that enabled him to proceed towards meaning: to catch sight, in meaning, of a situation that precedes culture and to work out a language of images that insist on their transparency. He never was interested in painting that tells a story unless it is the fundamental story, of genesis, of becoming.”96
Swaminathan had much radical thought about the modernism in Indian art. He thought that Indian art should not be viewed through a Western point-of-view. He actively chose to move away from the academic limitations of the Bengal School as well as of European Modernism. His quest for Indian art devoiced from the Western influences had given a shape to an art collective. In 1962, Swaminathan had founded the ‘Group 1890’, along with some like-minded artist friends including Jeram Patel, Ambadas, Rajesh Mehra, Ghulam Sheikh, Himmat sah, S.G.Nikam, Jyoti Bhatt, Eric Bowen, and Raghav Kaneria. Name of the group comes from the house number of Jayant and Jyoti Pandya in Bhavnagar, where all the artists had group together. “The attraction of the eleven-member Group 1890 to material/ritual/occult signs reissued the modernist enterprise for the coming years. It came to be situated with peculiar aptness in a visual culture of iconic forms still extant in India. The indigenism produced a playful modernist vocabulary replete with metaphorical allusions.” The first and only exhibition of Group 1890 held in October 1963 was inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru and introduced by the poet Octavio-Paz.

Fig.6.81. Untitled, J. Swaminathan, 1965
In his early sixties, his works show a great sensibility for the richness and raw vitality of folk or tribal Indian paintings and cave paintings. (Fig.6.81, 6.82) He had rejected the hybrid methods and mannerisms imported from Europe. In paintings “...he incorporated tribal motifs in his art. He was drawn towards tribal elements because he felt an aversion for artificiality of the so-called civilized society. His art reflected the spontaneity of his own consciousness. In fact, this was a landmark in his quest for the space in which true could be born. The search for the ‘savage consciousness’ in tribal art linked him with his own personal quest could be likened with the quest of Paul Gauguin in the wilderness of Tahiti a century ago.”

Swaminathan’s paintings “…drew upon the collective assemblage of myths and symbols in folk, and other subterranean passages of culture that attempted to reach the unknown in a kind of blind intuitiveness. The borrowed image held a certain amount of intrinsic power; the rest he wishes to infuse by the particular confluence of elements on the picture plane. The whole became a composition of non-descriptive, only partially associative images, combined with 'automatic writing', darkly painted upon dark surfaces, appearing as if they were being seen at the end of a dark passage in a temple”

He believed in the Indian folk and tribal art and was
aware that the wealth of this art would ultimately engage all his professional artistic energies. He thought that the folk art of rural India was as contemporary as the art that was being called contemporary at that period.

Later, in the 60s he had produced a series of paintings titled “The Colour Geometry of Space” that portrayed bold and brilliant colors of the Pahari miniature paintings and shapes from the tantric mandalas from the 17th and 18th centuries. “I

Fig.6.83. The Yellow Sign, J. Swaminathan, 1960

Fig.6.84. The Double Sign, J. Swaminathan, 1965
made a 180 degree shift in my painting. I tried to probe the relation of colour to space and after a study of Pahari miniature did a series called the colour Geometry of Space. In this series he divided the pictorial space into flat fields of solid color inspired from the Pahari miniature painting in sharp geometric shapes - square, rectangle, circle and triangle taken from the tantric mandalas. “In the contemporary Indian art, he was probably the first who provided the native Indian context to modern abstract art. In his ‘Geometry of Space’ series he gave a new idiom to abstraction. In his abstractions, there was openness, a feeling of liberation. These paintings are also had spiritual symbolism of a sublime kind.”

(Fig.6.83, 6.84, 6.85, 6.86)

Fig.6.85. Untitled, J. Swaminathan, 1965.

For him, Art becomes a medium to liberation in the life. He had developed a deep interest in the philosophy of Vedanta. The understanding of Vedanta’s philosophy gave him a metaphysical context to his abstract motifs of colour geometry of space. As he wrote “After working and struggling through a dozen canvases I arrived at what I like to call the Colour Geometry of Space. My intention
was not the analysis of space. It was while working with these geometrical forms in colour that space was revealed to me, space that is beyond analysis.....I believe that the analytical and constructive approach in Western painting had attempted to build space, whereas space by its very nature is that which is not manifest.....The triangle and the rectangle and the circle as colour, I find, are windows on the ‘Avyaktam’, the Unmanifested.”

His works shows his quest for the deep spiritual reverence that seeks to reveal truth through nature. In his ‘The Colour Geometry of Space’ series, he explored flat planes of colour with the various geometric forms. (Fig.6.87, 6.88)

He also 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. 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 for pictorial purpose. “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.”^103

Swaminathan believed that art belonged to the realms of freedom and the
imagination. It does not translate nor recreate reality and it does not aspire to
represent or narrate life. “In contradiction to the Western approach, the traditional
Indian painting approach of painting-space has always been geometric. This,
because painting was never meant to ‘represent’ reality in the naturalistic ‘objective’
sense, it was the cogent and poetic rendering of ideal truth in terms of two-
dimensional space.”^104
In 1966, Swamnathan had also started a art journal named ‘Contra ’66, with the help of Mexican poet Octavio Paz. Though the journal was a short-lived venture, but Swaminathan had raised some serious question on the notion of modernism in Indian art through this journal.

In the Late sixties, Swaminathan turned toward the nature in his compositions. Swaminathan had started to assimilate the elements from nature in his conceptual landscapes. His depiction of nature was not just an imitation but the embracing the metaphorical quality of the surrealists while preserving the formal qualities of Indian miniature painting. In his paintings mountains, trees, rocks and an archetypal bird had juxtaposed on the pure expanse of colour that inhabited his canvases. He borrowed the term 'numinous image' from Philip Rawson to speak about his magical and mysterious space that is not obvious but is inherent everywhere. His conceptual landscapes with the Mountain, Bird and Trees had achieved a kind of meditative stillness. Swaminathan “…managed to dissociate common phenomena from its natural associations and lodge it as it were, in a universe of mystery and wonder, creating images which are about to reveal themselves but never quite do so”105 (Fig.6.89, 6.90, 6.91)
Swaminathan, in his quest for this new modernist ‘Indian’ vocabulary, turned to the rural, exploring not only the folk art of varied regions, but also the Pahari miniature traditions of North-Western India. His ‘Bird, Tree, Mountain’ series was the significant development in his artistic journey, in which he had achieved the simplicity of Indian folk art, and the intensity of Indian miniatures tradition. “Swami’s greater contribution was in giving Indian sources a contemporary validity and visual identity. His use of flat colours and spaces in his early work is reminiscent of the Indian miniature and I cannot recall anyone before Swami using the vivid Indian yellow in the manner he did.”106 (Fig.6.92, 6.93)
In 1980, Swaminathan had come to Bhopal. He 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 had 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.” With such a idea in mind he had created a unique museum named Roopankar Museum of Fine Arts at Bharat Bhawan.
During the late 1980s, Swaminathan’s canvases underwent a dramatic shift, in terms of technique, style and subject. Abandoning the depictions of nature in his Mountain, Bird and Tree series, Swaminathan shifted his focus towards a more primitive communication of the unrealized universe through tantric forms and tribal signs. During his tenure as Director of the Roopanker Museum at Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal, the artist gained a deep knowledge of the symbolic basis of several forms of tribal art, particularly that of Central India. “Madhya Pradesh also brought about a basic shift in my painting again. The live and vibrant contact with tribal cultures triggered off my natural bent for the primeval, and I started on a new phase recalling my work of the early sixties. If my work of the early sixties anticipated the journey of the eighties, my present phase recapitulates my beginnings. As sixty five, it is full circle or is it?”

Fig.6.95. Text-De-Texted, J. Swaminathan, 1992
J.Swaminathan was among the first who awarded the Nehru Fellowship, through his thesis entitled ‘Relevance of the Traditional Neumen to Contemporary Art’ remained unfinished but it was the beginning of understanding the tribal psyche which he later translated through his paintings. “Swaminathan was deeply aware of the historical intervention he was making on the art scene in India. He seriously questioned the notion that modernism in India emanated from its encounter with the West. For him there was a much open-ended and integrated continuum of modernism existed in India. It was from that Indian Modernism that Swaminathan drew his zeal for redefining the contemporary to include the so called folk and tribal with the urban, and to override the hiatus between arts and crafts.”

Fig.6.96. Symbols Becomes Signs, J. Swaminathan, 1992

Fig.6.97. Untitled, J.Swaminathan, 1993.

Fig.6.98. Untitled, J.Swaminathan, 1993
In last phase of his career his compositions becomes more complex in its geometrical vocabulary. Almost whole pictorial space was painted in, with strange images, which sometimes recognizable but submerged in the composition and become abstract in visual sense. Swaminathan “…was fascinated by the manner in which tribal perceptions created symbolic forms…Significantly, the paintings of the last phase of his life were concerned with the passage of a sign on its way to becoming a symbol. A symbol by its very nature is a means of communication sometimes of very complex ideas and it assumes a commonality of understanding between the maker and the receiver. In the case of Swami’s paintings the marks made with intentions and equally those which just happened to get there by virtue of the process, do not create symbols in the sense I have mentioned, but the completed painting is itself symbolic of the act of painting itself.”

His paintings of early nineties were different from his early experiments of 1960s. These paintings were not concerned with the known connotations of signs, but with a new language of abstract motifs. Their emphasis “…is on primal Indian symbols and their contemporary relevance, on indigenous abstraction, and the free surface treatment of the canvas” (Fig.6.99)

In that period, Swaminathan had given more emphasis to the rhythm and force of line in his compositions. Most part of his painting was coming out of his rhythmic lines. His geometric forms like triangles, circles and squares emerge freely
on the painted surface of the canvas devoid from conventional meanings. “His paintings of later period were a combination of formal and free execution in a variety of rhythms carried unconsciously. He brought his unconscious mind to play and attempted to bring in the vital element which eludes the mathematical or methodical statement… Swaminathan had perhaps gained the freedom of child to make the ‘Symbols Becomes Signs’ (Fig.6.94, 6.96) of visual appeal. Though he has fully involved, there was no emotional sensation or mood for allegories in the earlier works except for an enchanting quality. As it oblivious, neither the symbol nor the sign can be borrowed; for, they are dug out from one’s own depth of realization, of an allegiance to faith. Because, for those who created the symbols, they were soaked in the meaning.”112
Om Prakash

Om Prakash Sharma was born in 1932 at Bawal in Haryana. He belongs to a middle-class joint family, whereas his father was a railway employee. As he was the eldest among his seven siblings, he had a great responsibility on his shoulders. He had completed his graduation from the Meerut College in 1951. To fulfill his urge to study painting he got admitted the evening classes at Delhi Polytechnic and had got his National Diploma in Fine Arts in 1958. While he pursuing his studies at Delhi Polytechnic, he was also working as a art teacher in D.A.V. School at Paharganj. In 1956, he was appointed as a senior art teacher in Government Model School at New Delhi.

Om Prakash had started his artistic journey from the early fifties. In his early period he usually made landscape inspired from the Bengal School. His passion for landscapes makes him a regular traveler. From 1953 to 1956, he extensively travelled throughout the India and made lot of sketches and landscapes. In fifties, it was very difficult to earn from the painting practice. To fulfill the need of his family, he also had worked as illustration designer for books.

Fig.6.102. Megh Malhar, Om Prakash Sharma, 1959
Om Prakash had a great interest in classical music of India. In 1956, he started learning the Sitar, which gave him opportunity to understand the various aspects of classical music of North India. During this period he had came into contact with Pandit Ravi Shankar, who helps him to understand the traditional iconography of different ragas. Further he had made a series of Ragmala paintings (Fig.6.102) based on the various ragas and associated raginis. Although his Ragmala paintings were figurative paintings mainly inspired from Pahari miniature paintings, but he used the colours symbolically based on the expression of mood in the context of ragas. As Pandit Ravi Shankar wrote “He has conceived the mood and the expression of different ragas in his own way and with his own feelings about them.”

In 1960, Om Prakash turned towards abstraction, which gradually developed in his landscape based compositions. During this period, he went to Kashmir, which brought him closer to the beauty of nature in the magnificent Himalayas. After coming back to Kashmir, he had painted a series of watercolours compositions based on his memories of the Kashmir. These compositions were not realistic representation of the subject. Most of his compositions of this period were dominated by the abstract imagery and decorative patterns. “His landscapes, especially those of Kashmir, are deeply felt canvases, in which there is not only a
lovely use of space but also an overall mood that is most attractive. His marshalling of space is excellent, in several of his tree-scapes the mist and snow of the area dominates the picture and gaunt, bare branches of the trees emerge from the old mist. Such is Trees a lovely work by any standard, almost abstract and yet evocative of a lyrical reality.”

His compositions such as ‘Kajiyar’ (Fig.6.103), ‘Kashmir Tree’ (Fig.6.104), ‘Kashmir Landscapes’ (Fig.6.105), were significant in this context.

In 1961, he had joined as Art Teacher at the School of Art and Architecture in New Delhi, which enabled him to have contact with architecture and design. In 1964, He had got the Fulbright Scholarship for post-graduate study in Art and Art History at Columbia University. He left India to complete his two year program in fine arts in 1964. As Fulbright scholar, his research work was based on the artists who copied old masters. Besides studying at Columbia University and Art Student's, he continuously exhibited his works in various galleries. He preferred instead, painting small format works. He came into contact with many prominent artists of that time including Mark Rothko, whom he greatly admired. More importantly, he was able to get the perspective to look objectively at his own roots through Indian Culture and Philosophy.
He continued his daily practice on Sitar in this period, and gave several concerts, including at Philharmonic Hall of Lincoln Centre and New York. He also took a course in Chinese calligraphy to learn its technique. Inspired by the spontaneous expression of calligraphy, he had painted about hundred small works on rice paper in Chinese ink. (Fig.6.106) He also learnt various graphic techniques including Lithography, Etching and Wood-cut and Engraving. But he gave up the print-making as the graphic techniques did not suit to his temperament.

His interest in Indian classical music inspired him to work with musical moods and experiments with the forms and colours. He again started his work on the theme of ragmala in non-representational imagery. The varied musical moods in his compositions expressed in his sharply defused tones of colours, which created the live colour reverberations. “There is distinct musical quality, a precise kinship with sound patterns and melody”\textsuperscript{115} Om Prakash had created a personal language of expression, in which colours and the complex pattern of geometric structure established their own relation of colour harmony and sound vibrations. He continuously worked on the theme throughout the whole decade. His paintings like ‘Ragini of the Moonlight’ (Fig.6.107), ‘Bhairav’ (Fig.6.109) and ‘Fanfare’ (Fig.6.108) were significant painting in this context. In his painting ‘Ragini to the
Moonlight’ his intention was to capture the harmony in the picture space with the varied tones of white, pink and blues. He applied the colours on the canvas in multiple layers, which had created the tension on the surface.

In 1966, in the way back to the India, he spent about four months in Europe. He visited to the various significant museums and galleries in various European countries. His visit to Europe was an eye-opener for him. As he wrote “Such abundant exposure made me dumbfound, because I saw that everything conceivable had been painted over the centuries with great excellence At that point in my career, I realised that I did not want to do what has been done already, I had to find my own way. Thus the question of my identity became crucial for me. The ongoing concern of what to paint and how became secondary. I was not interested to become an entertainer, documenter, messenger or illustrator, but to strive for creating something new and unique. Therefore, I had to distil out all that which could interfere with my objective even at the cost of sacrificing good ideas and achievements which would look convincing and attractive otherwise. I could not paint for months and suffered psychologically as a helpless bimbo with the weight of my own thought process and feelings which were unable to find an outlet.”

After coming back to India, his compositions emerges as fine assimilation of Indian and Western influences, but its inner content was authentically Indian.
In 1967, Ajit Mukerjee's book 'Tantra Art' was published by Kumar Gallery. The book got wide appreciation in the art world and it influenced the number of Indian artists to work with the Hindu philosophy of Tantra. Om Prakash was highly influenced by the form, thought and philosophy presented in the book. This also inspired him to go deep and explore the Tantric Yantras and Mandlas in much wider perspectives. As he said that “I am no Tantric and I am not interested in reviving or simulating Tantra Art, I could not even if I wanted to. 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.”\(^{117}\) In 1969, he also met with Swami Muktananda, whose thoughts and philosophy influenced him throughout, his life and his art. As he wrote “We debated mostly on the meaning and place of spirituality in the context of creativity, which was then becoming a big concern for my painting concepts.”\(^{118}\)

Om Prakash’s interest in metaphysical thoughts of tantric philosophy led him to the arid zone 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. 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 approach to colour and technique is unconventional to say the least. He doesn't refrain from using pinks, violets, and light green, baby blue - the hues that will shock some other painters. But evidently what is crucial is context, the adjoining colours, and composition. He has adopted the flat application or tempera technique, employed brilliantly in our miniature paintings, but using oil paints. He uses smooth brushes to get that effect and mixes very little oil to prevent glare.”

Most significant aspect about Om Prakash’s paintings was the use of geometry in his painting. In his early compositions, he used the various geometric shapes, such as circles, lines and arcs in much arbitrary manner. But In the late sixties, geometrical shapes emerge in his composition in a highly suggestive manner. “Worthwhile geometric abstractions are not tantamount to mere decorative designs or coloured diagrams. Like all other good paintings, they are concerned with the communication of reality. But the reality they endeavour to express is entirely different – it is the absolute, plastic reality, the basic reality of geometrical shapes, strait lines, angles, circles, triangles etc. that lies behind the outward reality, when divested of the external irrelevancies like meaning, story content, pictorial representations, and resembles to natural forms and objects.”

Fig.6.111. Duet, Om Prakash Sharma, 1967
Most of his early abstract works were based on the theme of radiation or energy, which is considered as living force of nature. “The theme is projected as a geometrical form; and because colour is eloquent on another level and in a different mode the artist has given us paintings, which are also interpretations of radiant phenomena.”

His geometric composition ‘Duet’ (Fig.6.111) for instance presented the concept of transmission of energy between two energy sources, depicted as the squares. Two triangles were placed in both the squares, each functioning like filtered prism. In whole composition all the geometrical forms such as squares, triangles, circles and colours have certain symbolic meaning, which makes the composition, a thoughtful object of contemplation not mere a design.

In 1969, he set up a studio at the Architecture School where he had taught art and basic design to young students. That was the period when, Om Prakash diversified his interests in various artistic pursuits besides painting. He also took evening classes of Sitar under Uma Shankar Mishra at Triveni Kala Sangam. He also had written scripts for films on classical musicians of India, which were produced by James Baveridge, a documentary film maker from Canada. In spite full time teaching responsibilities, he regularly exhibited his work at Kumar Gallery in New Delhi. In 1969, he got the national award on his painting entitled ‘Bhairav’, based on the raga Bhairav.
In the seventies, his compositions are predominantly based on geometrical abstraction and symmetry. Various symbols and elements of nature emerge in his compositions to support his painterly ideas. Nature plays a significant role in his compositions. As he wrote “My belief of the late sixties that creativity starts when all kinds of narrative and illustrative content with the use of known and familiar objects were completely avoided was retained by me in the seventies. But my exposure to nature again by periodically living in the mountains, gave me the insight that everything I was creating through geometry was also available in nature; if one looks concretely. However when elements of nature came back in my works again in a selective measure, it was not for copying nature but to recreate it, from and towards its core. My works became internalized. Their deceptive simplicity apart, it was formidable task for me to distil from the attractive external visual experiences and to integrate them with my internal chemistry before transferring them to unknown territories with-mystical overtones derived from realms of symbolism. It is not-easy to paint a mountain which is not there.”123 “…his finished work manages to belong simultaneously to two worlds: that distilled from reality and evoking it, very remotely, yet with rich poetic suggestion, and the world of pure conceptualization with the ideal beauty of a geometrical theorem.”124 His composition ‘Other End of
the Void’ (Fig.6.116) for instance is a perfect example of precision of the geometric forms in the picture space. He presented varied colour gradations against the prevailing black space. His other works such as ‘Transformations’, ‘Locks Unlocked’ (Fig.6.110), ‘The Central Chord’ (Fig.6.113), ‘The Illusory Window’ (Fig.6.114), ‘White of a Curve’ (Fig.6.115) and ‘Exit Through a Square’ (Fig.6.112) were significant in this context.

The precise technique of his geometry based paintings in oil colours, demanded months to finished. That makes his style of his work more slow in the process of making. That thing inspires him to paint in small format paintings on paper and board. Most of these compositions were abstract in its imagery and painted in much sensual colour, have symmetrically arranged geometric forms, which are set against the tonal backgrounds. In 1976, inspired by the exposure to nature in the hills of Mussoorie, he painted a series in watercolours. In his watercolours, he returns to the spontaneous expression. In these abstract landscapes “Symmetry has lost its tyrannical hold and colour modulates in many tones, yielding startling brilliancies within the clean-edged segments of the design. There is magical interplay of what seems like beams of coloured light overlapping and blending.”125
Around 1978, he started painting on the shaped canvases, in which he explored with various geometrical forms including triangle, pentagons, heptagons, hexagons etc. (Fig.6.118, 6.119) “It was kind of a challenge to the form of rectangle which has been used for centuries as a format for painting, barring a few exceptions. As a matter of fact, I realised that the form of rectangle with its perfect symmetry has become an integral part of our life right from the book, table, doors and windows to the surrounding walls. Such a domination, I thought to be a bore. Whatever, I have already painted squares which were hung diagonally. Perhaps that also inspired me to paint in acrylics, regular and irregular triangles, pentagons, and hexagons etc. on canvas stretched on specially made frames.”

In his compositions “Om Prakash has never broadly relied on the profound geometry of the yantras and mandalas. His paintings are like orchestrated geometry” Om Prakash has freed himself from the traditional association of meaning. Structures of the forms become more complex in his composition. The planes he creates like the complex diamond bring out more complex inter-relationships.
“Om Prakash's paintings are obviously inspired by and aligned with the spiritual and visual manifestations of Tantra. Symbolism or its improvisations play an important role……. However, the crucial elements are the emanation, and or bursting of primordial sound, having numerous vibrating tones, which by and large, have different corresponding colours and hues.” In the mid-eighties, neo-tantra imagery re-emerges in his compositions. His Composition ‘Glorified Seed’ (Fig.6.120), almost painted in geometric shapes in subdued tones of blues, which presented the concept of germination in a much mystical manner. In this period he had painted some finest compositions such as ‘Primordial’ (Fig.6.122) and ‘Emergence’ (Fig.6.121).
In 1981, he joined as a Principal in College of Art, New Delhi. He left his studio at the School of Planning and Architecture and also shifted to the government flat, which did not have a proper place to set up a new studio. But, somehow he managed to paint in spite of his responsibility of the new job as a principal of a premier institute of art in the country. In 1986, He started painting his ‘Mandala’ series, which was the beginning of his new phase in abstraction. That was the time he managed to set a new studio in the college, which he considered as meditation temple for him.

From 1986 to 1991, he extensive worked on the theme of ‘Mandala’. “Beyond the visual level a mandala 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”¹²⁹ He did not paint mandalas as meditational object or as mere a geometric design. His intension was to create a thoughtful object of contemplation. In this period “Om Prakash's paintings, essentially, are rooted in Mandala traditions; they are composite forms with internal structures, and their constituent parts multiply in the process of their interaction or in their pattern formations.”¹³⁰

Fig.6.123. Mandala Dawn, Om Prakash Sharma, 1990
He transformed the basic principal of balance in nature to a series in abstract painting. Each of his abstract ‘Manadala’ paintings had a structured narrative of tantric symbols. “Om Prakash's mandala images seem to release energy to the extent that he is concentrating upon and has identified himself with. His working vocabulary of forms is linked with Tantric symbols: the square, circle, triangle, crescent associated with the elements in nature and of course the point - the centre. These are not always placed in any traditional order, but juxtaposed according to a perceptual process.”  

His close association with nature and music plays a significant role. He consciously correlates musical vibrations with colours to compose the picture space in his compositions. He created a certain kind of kaleidoscopic design in varied chromatic vibrations in his paintings. His geometric forms “embody a music like orchestration of moods and feelings originating in the contemplation of something as cosmic as creation and a manifest as nature. The images comprise tidily structured line bound areas of colours evoking finites of circles and rectangles often bordered with decorative bands. Red, orange, green, yellow, violet and ochre are employed diversely in lucid, flat, toned or textured washes overlaid with strokes of the same or different hues softly vibrating and emoting like slow-paced music.” This is the reason that most of his mandala paintings are entitled after the ‘Ragas’ such as ‘Shree Raga Mandala’, ‘Mandala Sarang’, ‘Sanjh Mandala’ etc.

Fig.6.124. On the Top of the Clouds, Om Prakash Sharma, 1991
In the beginning of the nineties he painted a series of paintings entitled ‘On the top of the Clouds’ (Fig.6.124, 6.125), which reveals a significant development in his creative development. In this series of work he came back to the nature in a much innovative manner. In these compositions “Om Prakash has broken the web of geometric formulation in favour of a more fluid form approach. The celestial scenes, more than 30,000 ft. above the sea-level, observed from the window seats of the aeroplane during his foreign travels, have once again drawn him to the irresistible grandeur of nature. The apocalyptic sky-scapes and the awe-inspiring sunsets which he witnessed from that altitude have provided him with a highly fantasized experience of the mystery and essence of nature. Forms of fluffy clouds and serene rays of setting - sun indeed enchant the mind. He has endeavored to transfigure these experiences into glowing colours on his canvasses.”

Fig.6.125. On the Top of the Clouds, Om Prakash Sharma, 1991

Fig.6.126. Mandala, Aurora , Om Prakash Sharma, 1996

Fig.6.127. Major Scale, O.P. Sharma, 1997

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The concept of the ‘Mandala’ fascinated his creativity to absorb the countless experiences of life, and nature around him. The ‘Mandala’ for O.P.Sharma created a world of its own that culminated the physical, emotional and spiritual levels. It was an all-encompassing space that radiated with the energies of the self. As he said “It is a complex world of mystery which demands everything you have and can have. Patience, meditative thinking and extremely hard and precise discipline are some of the needed essentials. Consequently, it made my journey painfully slow; unsuitable to my chemistry / personality which can still make me passionately restless” Om Prakash still on his constant search for his personal expression in abstraction within the board spectrum of nature, music and tantra.
Prabhakar Kolte

Fig.6.130. Prabhakar Kolte in his Studio

Prabhakar Kolte is an accomplished artist in the context of the development of abstract painting in India. He was born in 1946 in Maharashtra. He had received his diploma from the Sir J.J. School of Art in 1968. After completing his studies at J.J. School, he had joined the Bombay Dyeing as a textile designer. During his studies at J.J. School, S.B. Palsikar was the true mentor for Kolte. Palsikar was a significant painter in the mid-fifties and also working as a teacher and Dean at the J.J. School. Palsikar has not had a direct influence on his work; his teachings and guidance helped him to understand the aesthetics and the fundamentals of art. Palsikar as a painter and teacher introduced him, the painting as a way of thinking and self expression.

Kolte had started his journey as an artist in the late sixties. At that time he was highly influenced from the paintings of Paul Klee. The early work of Prabhakar Kolte shows such influences, his child like forms captured by thin lines and sensitive application of colours. As he himself said that “In those days people used to call me the Indian Paul Klee. It didn't really bother me because I was busy searching for myself.” (Fig.6.132) Kolte had a great interest in teaching from his student days, which bring him back to J.J. School of Art as a teacher. Prbhakar Kolte joined the J.J. School in 1972, which boost his career not only as a painter but also as an influential teacher.
In the seventies, he had also started painting in oils besides watercolours, but still the influence of Klee warped on his style of painting. Kolte was very much aware of this influence and he began subside that influence from his paintings by doing various experiments in his paintings. In 1973, Kolte’s style reaches to pure abstraction with his painting entitled ‘Skyscape’, was an important painting in the evaluation of his career. In 1978, he come with an important series of works Painting A,B,C,D. (Fig.6.133) In these paintings, he painted the complex structure of organic and geometric forms, floating on the single coloured intensified surface of his picture plain. (Fig.) His another important series works come in this period
named ‘Eternal Trapezoid’ “…embodying an idea which is as philosophical as it is geometrical, Kolte is used to employing vivid reds and greens, especially in oils and the canvases of this period are no exception to this exuberance, but this feeling is never encouraged by conventional patterns. The forms are as austere as the general approach at the artist.”

He also used some unique titles like ‘Space Elecrified’ (Fig.6.134) and ‘Space X-Rayed’ (Fig.6.131) in this period. By the time, Kolte established himself as a painter and teacher. He had won the various awards including, Bombay Art Society’s gold medal, Maharashtra state award, and Prof. Langhammer award from the Indo-German Cultural Society.

In the eighties, Indian contemporary art scene had drastically changed. In this post-modern period, installations, performances and happenings emerged as new mediums of expression besides conventional medium of painting and sculpture. He had started his experiments with installation and performance art. In an installation, he covered a car with newspaper; in another, he painted a volunteer black and entitled him ‘A Man without Shadow’. Such experiments allowed him a free space to play with abstract ideas of color and form away from the influence of Paul Klee.
After a short span of time, he came back to his canvas, but now he wanted to liberate himself from the influence of Klee. In 1983 he comes with his new series of work entitled ‘Fragility’ (Fig.6.135). In these painting, he comes with an irregular organic form, which constitute a lyrical style of abstract painting. During this exhibition he had made important statement “I do not see and paint but paint and
see.” It was really a contradicted statement as Jitish Kallat pointed out “But it must have been disheartening to paint and see that what one has painted one has already seen.” Kolte gives more intention to his inner voice than to the observing things. As he said “It is surely my inner voice that guides me to paint. I observe almost everything that comes in front of me. Some things touch my soul but I do not pose them directly in my painting. I do not believe in observing and then painting, I rather like to first paint and then observe and feel its effect. This gives me immense satisfaction of creation and adjoins significance to my painting. My painting is Something out of Nothing but Not of Something.” In this period, Kolte was searching for ‘pure’ or ‘abstract form’, liberated from any recognizable reference. As he wrote “While painting I used to immediately cover up any identifiable image, making sure that my forms would function as pure colour in space.”

Another important aspect about his paintings was the texture on the surface. Texture in his compositions was achieved through overlapping the preceding layers of colours. “Unlike most painters he moves the canvas round on all the sides and paints. He creates textures in a simple manner, never, trying flashy, three dimensional effects.”
In the nineties, Prabhakar Kolte, started his work with new vocabulary of bright colours, grid based format, flat surface and drip colours. These compositions were much different from his prior works. (Fig.6.139, 6.140) His compositions were densely dominated by the broad sweeps of paint with bold gestures with some painterly brush strokes. His complex mélange of colliding forms made a girded structure in the picture space. Usually, he applied the colours on the canvas in many layers. Following this, the broad sweeps of paint are overlaid, covered the large areas of the under painting. His large brush strokes seem to be melting and dripping. His final gesture with colour destroyed most of his painted area, but some underneath space scintillate from the ground, which creates the interest in the picture space of his compositions. “…the formal logic of Kolte's art is to generate forms and envelop them, to first create and then obliterate. He sets up a kind of mock-censorship wherein we are denied entry into certain areas of the painting; and yet by a skilful manipulation of opacity and translucency he makes suggestions of the mélange of forms and colours eclipsed behind the surface coat.”
Around nineties, he discarded the tendency to give titles to his abstract creations and leaves his canvases as ‘Untitled’. Kolte finds his abstract composition very close to nature’s creation. As he said “Nature created the world by using her elements, She did not name her creations. Similarly I use the basic fundamentals of painting to make art. Why should I title them?” His abstract works had the essence of urban architectural landscapes, in which some city like structure had emerged on the picture space. His works had close affinities with nature; forms emerge and destroyed, and then re-emerged like completing the circle of life in nature. He was also fascinated by the interplay of colours in nature. As he said “Gradually, as if by some force of gravity, I was drawn from picture to object; from object to nature, directly into the heart of nature, that is to say, deep within myself. Now, I no longer feel like emerging from this interior space, so much am I at home in it.” He completely detached any symbolic meaning from his abstract creations. (Fig. 6.141, 6.142)

Kolte spent twenty-two years teaching at the J. School of Art. His teaching method had also played a significant role in his artistic journey as a teacher. Kolte himself trained at J.J.School of Art and had close affinities with artists like S.B.Palsikar, Moahn Samant and V.S.Gaitonde, which not only helps him in his painting practice but also influenced him to develop his own theory. Being as an
artist, who works in abstraction, he also disseminated his formalistic interventions among his students. As he said “My devotion to teaching was paramount. I have been a teacher first and a painter afterwards.” After his retirement in 1994, he devoted his whole time to his paintings and writings.

His works at the beginning of twenty-first century shows his constant search for pure form in the compositional space. (Fig.6.143 to 6.146) His works shows a more finished approach to his earlier themes in paintings. The strong and flat colour in the ground still remains, but both the colour and the forms overlaid onto it retain a sharpness in line and colour. The influence of Klee had completely dropped out in favor to achieve more concrete, and thus more abstracted colour fields.
Fig. 6.145. Untitled, Prabhakar Kolte, 2004

Fig. 6.146. Untitled, Watercolours, Prabhakar Kolte, 2005
Sujata Bajaj

Sujata Bajaj was born in a Marwari family of Jaipur in 1958. She completed her early education in Jaipur and then after she moved to Pune. She had completed her Graduation and post-graduation in drawing and painting from the S.N.D.T. University. Her parents recognized her budding talent at her young age. Her mother was more like a friend and teacher, who always been encouraging her passion in visual arts especially in painting. After completing her masters in painting she had completed her Doctorate on her research thesis on the tribal art.

In 1988, Sujata got the French Government scholarship to study painting in Paris. In Paris she enrolled at the Ecole Nationale Superieur Des Beaux Arts and study painting for two years. When she came to Paris, she was welcomed by artist S.H.Raza. Actually, He was Raza, who introduced her to the idea of going to Paris to learn about the French Art World. She also worked at Studio Claude Viseux for some time.

Her early years in Paris have been very refreshing for her. She regularly visits the Gallery exhibitions and museums to see the works of contemporary European art as well as the works of the earlier masters. At the Des Beaux Arts in Paris, the environment was encouraging. She was introduced to a new world, which comprised of thousands of books, people in the art world and initially helped her to find her own expression. In Paris, S.H. Raza was the true mentor for Sujata. It was to him that she attributes her pictorial understanding and a fine appreciation of colour, line and form as essential elements of an artwork. Raza has not had a direct influence on her work; his teachings and guidance have resulted in an overlapping and spill over of aesthetics and the fundamentals of art. In this period she was still working in her non-representational vocabulary.

Later she introduced with artist Claude Viseux, which becomes fruitful for her development in painting. From Claude Viseux, she learnt the technique of monotype print making, which fascinated her so deeply. Monotype “…involved inking a metal plate, working on the black, placing a leaf underneath and setting the press in motion. The metal plate could be substituted by a glass one. Degas greatly
admired these quaint little techniques which in fact could be used for making no more than one print.” This technique which involved the co-ordination of a printmaker’s skills with those of a painter and a collage maker; which she has mastered with facility, exerts a persuasive influence on her art. (Fig 6.147, 6.148, 6.149)
Sujata started her journey in art with the genre of landscape painting but kind of abstract expressionistic. In her abstract landscapes her intention was to capture the Indian essence as she said “The deepest source of my art lie here, in the landscape of India, its colours, its seasons, the symbols of rich past”\(^{147}\). She usually paints in bold and thick colours which created the texture on the surface of canvas. Her intention was to capture the vibration of energy on the picture space. She achieved her own expression in colours without losing the Indian essence due to her deep understanding of her roots and cultural heritage.

While Bajaj’s inspiration is firmly rooted in her Indian heritage, she also draws much from the new artistic movements and techniques that she was exposed to following her move to France. Bajaj uses variations and modifications of printmaking, as well as working as a painter and collage artist. “A marked evolution is visible in her technique; the monotype has grown more discreet, voluntarily ceding place to the brush and collage.”\(^{148}\) She frequently experiments with the varied mediums, techniques and materials including painting on handmade paper, fabric printing, printmaking, mixed media, and collages. (Fig.6.150, 6.151, 6.152)
Sujata Bajaj did marriage with Rune Jul Larsen, a Norwegian who was settled in Paris. After marriage she had a period of struggle in Norway. Here, she continued her style with her colourful decorative works. Sujata gradually moves in
between India, France and Norway, but she engaged herself to the diversity of the different cultures with a great balance and understanding. “Straddling continents and societies she is as much of a wanderer as Raza. Living in Norway with her husband and daughter, working out of Paris and now exhibiting in India brings a certain global perspective and art practice. India serves as a point of reference and departure with her work describing colour, rhythm balance, harmony, coupled with a sense of spirituality and serenity.”

Sujata had been done her research work on Indian tribal arts, which gave her an opportunity to explore the art works of various tribes. She traveled throughout the India to study the art work of various tribes, mainly the Madia-Muria of Baster, the Bhil in Rajasthan, and the Warli in Maharashtra and the Saora in Orissa. “Indian tribal art serves as a source of inspiration adding to her passion for and appreciation of spontaneity, simplicity and authenticity in art.” Although she had not employ tribal symbols and icons in her painting but she was highly influenced by the force and the simplicity of the tribal motifs.
Nature is the driving force behind the works of Sujata, as her works grow through an evolution that is intuitive rather than organic. Nature is integral part of her creative psyche. She gradually translates nature into her colours, which becomes her expression of her perception of ideas. Her colours are a language for her expressions. Taking inspiration from the nature she constituted her works on the elements of nature. Sujata has done a series on of work entitled ‘Earth’, another series encompassing a resonance of ‘Agni’ (Fig.6.155) and ‘Jal’. Sujata’s expression is inevitably rooted in the native idioms because it highlights modes of Indian philosophical consciousness. Sujata is in a constant process of evolution and development in the struggle to articulate her unique artistic vocabulary.
She continued with her ‘Energy’ series in mixed media art works. She employs various media techniques like paint, wax, monotype graphic and collage of papers to create her composition. “Variety of media, pigment and techniques gather on the surface of the artist’s picture plane, somewhat like memories which converge in a rare moment from several different sources and rush into an effulgent flame nonchalantly and spontaneity. Numerous layers are worked upon with an admirable blend of impetuosity and restraint, and not even the minutest denudation will ever reveal the private meanderings which constitute these translucent veils.”

The forms within the Sujata’s mix media paintings appears to be synthesis of ancient and contemporary, which transcend boundaries of colour, form and composition. “Her mixed-media works and acrylics garner inspiration from a wide array of sources: which her training as an anthropologist and her preoccupation with tribal art has sensitised her to the significance of a single iconic detail, her artistic sensibility permits her to the sweep of pure from. Her palette luxuriates in the memories of a childhood spent in Rajasthan and an adolescence spent in Maharashtra; her frames are aglow with the blazing yellows and oranges of the desert, the more shadowed reds and greens of the Deccan scarp, all orchestrated with the Parisian subtlety and sophistication of an alumna of the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts.”  

(Fig.6.157, 6.158)
She used the texture and colour with persuasive symbols and text in Devnagri script from the old manuscripts. “And in the elegant calligraphy of the sacred texts, the cicular hymns repeated until the pitch of perfectionist has been achieved, we hear again the poignant aphorisms of unknown grammarians, the tropes of long-dead scribes who yearned for the joy of transcendence, the peace of eternity. Time has stilled their voice, but their presence manifest itself, unsilenced in Sujata’s pictorial language”\(^{153}\) She used torn pieces of the paper blend with the fragmented Sanskrit text in her bold monotypes, which are virtually collage differ the objects, elements and texture.

In later period, colour comes to emerge as the major attribute in her compositions. She used the almost dark surfaces in such a manner that her sharp reds, vibrant yellows, and pulsating blues appears as a source of light in her compositions. “In her works, light is a symbol of energy, much so that the two cannot separated. She paints energy. She paints the absolute nature that sustains us, which is eternal and all encompassing. She does it through the colour, her manipulation of lines and also in prophetic words. It finally appears on her canvas in
spiritually-imbued form.” With the text in Sanskrit from the Gita, Vedas, and other scriptures that has become an integral part of her composition. “Sujata claims that the ancient Sanskrit scripts, which are preserved as specific remnants in each work, are not coincidental in relation to expression in each, completed picture. She discovers traces of philosophical works in Indian antiquarians, but before using them she consciously recapitulates the chain of thought in each text, and lets the mood from the process influence her artistic expression… This Thought process is also specifically reflected in the images and interplay of lines – in the way forms and colours are constructed and balanced.” There are unseen geometric pattern and rhythmic movements in her colours which creates a spiritual feelings and impressions of the mindscapes. (Fig. 6.159, 6.160)

Sujata used a minimalist approach in the depiction of the complex language of her emotions. She paints in simple lines which transforms into passionate
brushstrokes of colours. Sujata's art "is marked for its spontaneity, a playful palette and a vigorous texture in balanced abstract compositions that evoke rasas." Her domain of abstract images constitutes a space with colours, texture, text and composition to create art works that stimulate varied emotions. Each painting stands as a visible space on its own evoking a different emotion. There are glances of wonder and radiance, expressions of anger, terror and disgust and evocation of love, peace and harmony in her floating world of abstract images. Her spontaneous abstract images immersed in a bright colour palette that seem to create a meditated space.

Fig.6.160. Energy, Sujata Bajaj, 2005
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