CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The contemporary art scene in India is one of the most vibrant in the world and abstraction gives more colorful expression to it. Abstraction becomes the major trend in post-independence modern Indian art. From 50’s to till this date abstract art in India passes through the various phases of development. The lure of abstraction provides a central pre-occupation to many significant artist and its impulses so strong that at the beginning of the new century it remains an option for many individual artists to carry on the quest for sheer visuality. Abstraction has been given a very significant contribution in the progress of modern Indian art.

The artists of the 1950s and 1960s in India initiated a major shift of attitude in our art which saw introduction and appreciation of abstraction as a major tendency in visual arts. The non-figuration practiced in the country is a sort of a sheer abstraction inspired by the Western Abstract Expressionists of the 1950s, but often than not it lacked the philosophical basis and social context. Gradually it became confined to a selective group of elite connoisseurs and consumers and thus lost contact with the ethos of the more crucial contemporary issues. It is important to acknowledge that a few of these artists were markedly talented and did works which displayed a keen sense of sensibility and craftsmanship. In this decade, modern art in India substantially progressed. It is not only modern for Indian society but also more internationally, as can be seen in the works of many Indian artists who have modified to traditional Indian art to a more modern perspective, yet preserving the Indian roots.

The fifties was a period of ferment and assimilation; the work produced during this period bear the influence of the Western modern movements. However, it is to be noted that while the impact of the West on certain phases of modern Indian art has been crucial, it has been largely catalytic rather than decisive. The sixties through the early seventies was a period of introspection. There was a reaction away from the western influence and an aspiration towards finding an Indian identity within the modern art idiom.
Indian abstract art has strong affinity with nature. Nature has always been a significant source for inspiration for artists. The pre-occupation of Indian abstract painters with nature is the essence rather than the appearance of the subject, that shows they are concerned with reality but of the different nature. A romantic language was created by artist, where nature was the excitant and aroused artistic intuitions regardless of the realities of the material world. Many expressed through nature where nature itself had become a source of inspiration for their vivid colored images on the two dimensional surface. These painters has been towards kind of abstraction which draws on observed reality to create the variously a conscious or unconscious imagery or a kind of organic and natural technology of form. For many Indian artists “abstraction does not imply escaping from or avoiding a consideration of nature. In fact the need to penetrate deeper into what constitutes nature, and which elements comprise or hold her secrets, led these artists to go beyond mere representational expression so as to be able to formulate a more personal and authentic interpretation. In the end nature as she exists in the environment and nature as she is in the self have similarities, and the phenomenal force which is creative in nature and in man perhaps is one.”1 Many significant artists find some meditation in its relationship with the exterior world. Among them Ram Kumar, Bimal Das Gupta, Ganesh Haloi, Bandhan Das, Shanti Dave, K.M.Adimoolam, K.Damodaran, V.S.Gaitonde, Surya Prakash, K.Jayapal Panicker, S.H.Raza, Manoj Kanchagal, Anil Gaikwad, This connection is not represented in its visual aspect but rather through either its effects upon the artists or else by an identification process that attempts to portray the vital principal.

Some distinguish artists are discovering innovative values in abstraction by experimenting with texture. They have been creating texture with various materials like collage, wax, threads, burnt wood, zinc powder, beads metal etc. They create new forms and arrange space which creates a new universe of organic forms, texture and color which constitute a reality of its own that is unknown to the real world. These painters are V.S. Gaitonde, Ram Kumar, Shanti Dave, Jeram Patel, Balraj Khanna, Piraji Sagra, Bishambhar Khanna, Surya Prakash, K.V.Haridasan, Smriti Dixit, Surender Pal Joshi, Yogendra Tripathi, Santana Gohain etc.
Indian folk arts have very rich ritualistic visual cultural heritage. Any artist who wants to go forward cannot evade the context which he or she lives in and on which the work is based. Tradition, following in him like the blood in his or her body, profoundly affects the artist’s way of thinking and of making of art. A number of abstract artists turned towards the folk-arts for their inspirations. These artists attracted towards folk-arts because of its beauty and characteristic vitality of the basic design elements, like simplified forms and shapes, bold use of line and large color planes, among them K.C.S. Panikar was the chief exponent, who showed a continued interest in linear design. He constantly used folk symbols, signs and scripts in his paintings; another significant artist was the J. Swaminathan, who inspired from the tribal ritual wall paintings. He created his own abstract vocabulary, which was very close to tribal art forms. Later many significant artists derived inspiration from the folk arts, such as Achuthan Kudallar, Nareen Nath, Sujata Bajaj, K.V.Haridasan, Shridhar Iyer, Yogendra Tripathi, Sanju Jain, etc.

All the arts have a symbolic component. Indian art has often been characterized as being symbolic and spiritual. Heinrich Zimmer, A.K.Coomaraswamy as well as E.B.Havell spoke eloquently of the symbolic and spiritual elements underlying Indian art. This twin component of symbolism and spiritualism had become main stay of argument in defending the Indian tradition. As a response to this, the Tantra art was rediscovered and its philosophy was used as supportive philosophical premise as an extension and nationalistic religious appropriations. Some distinguish artist went back to ancient tradition of occultism for their inspiration.

The subject of Tantra is generally considered highly esoteric and has always been shrouded in myth, mystery, superstitions and tradition. Neo-Tantra artist’s affiliation with ancient philosophy of Tantra is very unique in terms of imagery, thought and practice. In ancient times, tantrics used yantras and mandalas for the magical and ritualistic purposes. But Neo-Tantra artists used the geometric forms and symbols like, bindu, oval shape, square and circle in their paintings as a device to aid their contemplation. They adopted the cosmic imagery of the Tantra for pure plastic purposes. Because of this pre-occupation this particular trend of modern Indian art has come to be known as Neo-Tantra art. Soon the movement became
popular and it found many adherents throughout the country. Most of the Neo-Tantra artists worked in non-representational visual imagery. “Neo-Tantra artists are responsive to a broad range of stimuli from outside India, including international movement in contemporary art, with the same principles that inspired the pioneers of abstract art. For example, these Indian artists also believe that positive and negative are complementary rather than contradictory, just as male and female principles are. They are also interested in the role of primordial sound – which creates light and which in turn produces colour – in creation of the cosmos. It is also significant that, just as traditional Tantric Art was created by using symbolic images and totally abstract elements such as the square, circle, triangle and oval shapes, so also contemporary Indian artists are using both images and abstraction in their work”2

Neo-Tantra art gives new revival to Indian abstract art. Indian artists found an indigenous theory that has its roots in ancient mythological tradition. India’s ritual tradition is replete with the abstract symbolism to a degree that makes it almost commonplace and conventional. That is way Neo-Tantra painters found it necessary to innovate and distinguish themselves from the traditional manufacturers of ritual symbols by stressing formal aspect above its religious connotation. In the 70s and 80s, some distinguish artists in India reflects a desire to express symbolic, utopian, or metaphysical ideal inspired by tantric visual manifestation, as to find their own identity in their own tradition. Artist like K.C.S. Panikar, Biren De, G.R.Santosh, S.H.Raza, J. Swaminathan, Om Parkash Sharma, Pufulla Mohanti, Mahirvan Mamtani, K.V.Haridasan, V.Viswanadhan had created their own abstract style based on symbolic meaning deeply rooted in the Indian philosophy of Tantra.

Few distinguish painters turned towards minimalist variety of abstraction. Minimalist presented the work of art as object of elemental form with the least amount of visual components and divorced from the symbols and personal expression. Among them Nasreen Mohamedi was the most significant; her paintings based on line-grid pattern are rare of its kinds. Her work was influential for later minimalist like Shobha Baroota, Homi B. Patel etc.

Some distinguish artists also practices in gestural abstraction. These artists made of their paintings the display of direct projections of subjectivity onto the
canvas or of battles with matter. This approach was manifested through expressive gestures, without the interference of images amongst themselves but in such a manner that the touches on the painting’s surface show but the traces of an encounter. Their interest in actual techniques of creation is an important aspect. They used the color and form in an expressionist manner. Jeram Patel, J.Swaminathan, K.M. Adimoodam, Achunthan Kulddlar Manish Pushkale, Seema Ghurayya, Sachida Nagdev, Sujata Bajaj and Manoj Kanchangal were few artists, who worked in gestural abstraction.

While clearly an important part of early modernism, the decorative – and its association with domestic interior decoration, textile designs, fashion and femininity – came to be considered a terrible liability from which art practices, particularly those of modernist abstraction, had to be distanced and disassociated. So successful was this early campaign against the decorative, some artists and critics of modernist abstraction had to create a different vocabulary and rhetoric to describe an artwork that resembled or was associated with the “decorative”. This new rhetoric had to justify not only why the work was the next important development in modernist painting, but also create new and distinctive ways of seeing and understanding the visual experience of the work. “The most important meaning of abstraction for the majority of Indian artists, perhaps, was the one that rejected both imitation and decoration. Both the pairing away of content and the creation of mediate content came to dominant the Indian scene.”

The wide range of such concerns in Indian abstract art today reflects the fact that it has matured beyond the level of being primarily occupied with how to say things and now evolving an integrated approach based on what one wants to say. Thus abstraction in contemporary Indian painting has evolved into a complex œuvre.

In this thesis I have described how abstraction in Indian painting had developed through various means and influences during the second half of the twentieth century. Through my research, I have shown that the initial tendencies are relevant in contemporary abstract art. By focusing on the internal and external means for creating art, paying particular attention to the internal means, I have
shown how these means are evident within the contemporary works of artists in India. These artists actively sought to create an engaging form of art that can access feelings and emotions within the spectator, thus accessing the internal within the world of the external. Abstraction was no longer considered to be the means of creating a universal language based on reducing of the number or signs, but as the most appropriate method for transmitting, without the intermediary of figures or narration, the interior world of an artist, anchored in his subjectivity. Indian artists had developed their own identity by using their own indigenous sources and creative forms such as folk, tribal and tantra arts which emphasizing the interpretation of symbolism, mysticism and spiritualism.

Abstraction in India is as diverse as artists involved. Today artists are much aware of international trends and have begun to conceptualize their unique position in international contemporary art.
References

