CHAPTER 6
COMPARATIVE STUDY

Plate-31
Plate-32
Plate-33
Plate-34
Plate-35
Plate-36
Chapter- 6

Comparative study
(With other lady artist’s works with special reference to paintings related to Indian women)

ANJOLIE ELA MENON

Was born in 1940 in India of mixed Bengal American parentage. She went to school in Lovedale in the Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu and there after had a brief spell at the J. J. School of art in Bombay. Subsequently she earned a degree of English literature from Delhi University. After holding solo exhibitions in Bombay and Delhi in the late 1950s as a teenager, Menon worked and studied in Paris at the Ecole Des Beaux Arts in 1961-62 on a French Government scholarship. Before returning home, she travelled extensively in Europe and west Asia studying Romanesque and Byzantine art. Since then she has lived and worked in India, in England, U.S.A., Germany and the erstwhile U.S.S.R. She had over thirty solo shows at Black heath Gallery – London, Gallery Radicke-Bonn, Winston Gallery Washington, Doma Khudozhinkov-USSR, Rabindra Bhavan and Shridharni Gallery-New Delhi, Academy of Fine Arts-Calcutta, the Gallery-Madras, Jahangir Gallery, Chemould Gallery, Taj Gallery – Bombay and Maya Gallery at the Museum Annexe – Hongkong. A
Comparative study

Chapter - 6

retrospective exhibition was held in 1988 in Bombay. Menon has participated in several international shows in France, Japan, Russia and U.S.A.

In addition to paintings in private and corporate collections, her works have been acquired by museums in India and abroad. She is also a well known muralists and has represented India at the Algeirs Biennale, the Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil and three triennials in New Delhi. She has been invited by the British Council, the U.S. State Department and the French Ministry of Culture to confer with leading artists in those countries. Menon also served on the advisory committee and the art purchase committee of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, where she was co-curator with Henri Claude Causseau for a major exhibition of French contemporary Art in 1996. Her work recently went under the hammer at the Christies and Sotheby’s auctions of contemporary Indian art in London. A book titled “Anjalie Ela Menon’ has been published on her life and work.

THE ART OF ANJOLIE ELA MENON

Anjolie Ela Menon began painting in the mid 1950s. Her alchemy is a complex blend of the pensive and passionate, its imagery excavated form the deepest recesses of her subconscious. An aesthetic consistency characterizes a large body of her work, which swims against the tide, given
the correct tendency to defy the ugly, the angry and the grotesque in a milieu where an indiscriminate iconoclasm attacks almost any genre that smacks of tradition.

Anjolie’s work reveals that many of the qualities and motifs that are now being ascribed to her have their genesis in the paintings of the early years—basically in the 1950s. In these years, Anjolie Ela Menon painted with strong intuitive conviction but little formal schooling which was to come later. An endearing energy and enthusiasm characterize & the oil she did as a teenager. Anjolie seems to have applied paint with a palette knife, vigorous and bold strokes with some large unfinished areas. This technique is in sharp contrast to the highly finished quality and the immaculate glistening surface now associated with her signature.

Two years in the U.S.S.R. reinforced the artist’s interest in Byzantine and Romanesque art and gave rise to dark, brooding Christ-like male figures which also resemble her now bearded husband, Raja. As a kind of counterpoint, the benign mother and child compositions overlapped her own experience of motherhood. Anjolie insists that her role as mother and wife are integral to her growth as an artist.

On her return to India after the Russian experience, successful exhibition followed at the Academy of Fine Arts at Calcutta. This was an
important show for her as Anjolie revealed a confident and vibrant eclecticism wherein the visit to New York, the year in England and the Russian stint-coalesced. A distinctive, recognizable individual style was emerging. Desmond Doig, a well known writer of the period observed. “There is promise of another Amrita Shergil in the making.” This debut in Calcutta was of special importance to the Bengali in Anjolie and the show marked the successful return to her roots of a peripatetic artist.

By the end of the 1970s and in the early 80s, the paintings began to acquire an allegorical, narrative quality, but the myths and ballads were of Anjolie’s own making, a strange amalgam of East and West. What was once random symbolism coalesced around the nude with overtones of sexual specificity. The nude of the late 1970s exude an authenticity and spontaneity that was hesitant and tentative till then. The diaphanously clad women, the animals, birds and reptiles, the many persons who inhabit and impinge, this is a world of the artist’s subterranean existence, a world that has been crafted painstakingly by Anjolie. These myths supported by a complex imagery, are distilled from a highly individual subconscious and do not relate to the collective myth of any specific grow in an acceptable or recognizable manner.

In the paintings of the late 1970s there was often more than a hint of
death, which seemed a resurrection of the grief that remained suppressed after the death of her father in 1976. General Dev was an abiding presence in Anjolie’s life, and she recollects that he assumed both paternal and maternal roles after the tragic loss of her mother in 1955.

In 1980, Anjolie was invited by the cultural departments of France, Britain and the U.S.A. to visit museums and confer with artists in these countries, as also to see what was happening on the contemporary international art front. As a state guest her journeys were very different from the impoverished travels of her youth. In the autumn of 1980 her visit to the U.S.A. ended with exhibitions in New York and Washington.

Towards the mid-1980s, Anjolie discovered a set of old glass negatives and several albums of ‘royal’ pictures from the 1930s, in her husband’s ancestral home in Kerala. Over- adorned princesses sat on ornamental chairs all dressed up and laden with jewellery against fake victorian backdrops. Anjolie was fascinated by the quality of these yearly photographs and specially the formal stillness of the protagonists frozen in a timeless moment.

It was thus befitting that in 1988 Anjolie was chosen by ‘The Time of India’ to be part of their 150th anniversary celebration. A retrospective of thirty years spanning from 1950 to 1988 and presented as a part of the
sesquicentennial celebrations, was a rare honour for her considering that there was a wide and rich pool of senior and established artists for the Times to choose from. Bombay was an apt choice to hold Anjolie's first retrospective, for the city had provided her education, affection, education and aesthetic sustenance since her very first exhibition at the Bhulabhai institute in 1959.

In the late 1980s, Anjolie showed her work in New York in successive years when visiting her son Aditya each summer. Painting in his home at Westchester, she renewed her association with the art galleries and museums of Manhattan.

In early 1990s Anjolie introduced two new elements into her paintings. The serpent, which had appeared only insidiously in the past, enters in many works as a strong presence. She also began to embroider the bared bodies of sadhu-like figures with the fine stigmata of ritual tattoos, often using this essentially Hindu device to chant a compelling visual litany of both Ram and Rahim, no doubt reacting to the prevailing religious turbulence in India over emotive issues such as the Mandir and the Masjid. We also note that for the first time Anjolie reads to the symbolism of Hindu iconography. In the powerful triptych entitled Shakti, she interprets mythology in her own manner, depicting Ganesha in the form of a blue
body elephant sitting in the lap of Durga, the female principle. In like fashion Lakshmi is lotus headed and Saraswati is not just the goddess with the lute but the champion of modern science and the plastic arts as well. There are no doubt many rough edges that need to be smoothened, but her entry into this area augers well and may mark a new synthesis. Anjolie, with her western upbringing, deep Indian roots, a progressive Brahmo Samaj family ambience, Muslim and Christian cousins, marriage into the south and anempty with both the traditional and the modern has many strands to weave. It will be interesting to see what path she forges at a time when art, religion and politics have become intertwined in India and artists approach the twenty first century carrying the accumulated detritus of the past.

In her latest paintings, such as Visarjan and Journey to Bangkok, subjective intervention is reduced to the bare minimum. From plumbing the depth of her subconscious in the early years, Anjolie’s whole approach in the 1990s has shifted to a new plane. For the first time she assumes the role of observer and commentator, as in Wounds. However in her use of archetypal symbols, whether drawn from Christian retual or from an essentially Hindu world, she continues to imbue her paintings with luminous aura. In the ultimate analysis, her strength lies not in the
victuosity for that she continues to transcend it. However, it remains a paradox that the very poignancy of Anjolie’s configuration lies in the fact that the final direction of her creative compulsion is held in abeyance and remains unresolved.

ARPITA SINGH

Arpita Singh is one of the few women artists in Delhi who do not make virtue of ‘feminism’ as the only criterion for artistic achievement. Born in west Bengal in 1937, she had her art education at the School of Art Delhi, and the Delhi Polytechnic (1954-59). Since the beginning of her career, Arpita has been assiduously learning the craft of painting in rhythm with her absorption of modernist reductionism. Her native paintings are unlaboured particularly piquant in their comments on the ‘space’ of women and the girl child in the society, and on the atrophied sensibilities of modern man vis-à-vis the growing violence and social injustice. Arpita literally ‘builds up’ the painted surface, with the same patient facility both in oil and water colour. In 1991, the Sahitya Kala Parishad, New Delhi, honoured Arpita Singh with ‘Parishad Samman’. Her work are in the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, Punjab Museum, Chandigarh “Roopankar” Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, Chester Herwitz family collection, USA, Victoria and

**THE ART OF ARPITA SINGH**

The arduous task of drawing language in paint has marked Arpita Singh's work from the early years. That could explain her shifts from figurative to abstract in the 1960s. In the process, she has almost inadvertently highlighted the loneliness and forlornness of being a woman in India and the country itself with its seeping violence as it brings itself to a state of chaos.

The throbbing multiplicity of life in its myriad hues is manifest in the large body of Singh's figurative work. At first it seems like an enchanted world where objects, humans, and vegetation are all imbued with a magical life. We have "Apples and Chair, white Boat," or figures and Flowers where there is a lucid flowing lyricism. Fruits, flowers, boats, and figures all achieve an equal significance in animated manifestations. They dissolve into one another, life metamorphosing into life, creating magical symbiosis.

In the 1980s, Singh's work becomes even more lucid, bringing to the fore many contradictions of life in India with ducks invading her pictures, squatting on a chequered table cloth creating an uneasiness. There is a Car in Rosa Garden disturbing the peace and quiet, and in a somewhat somber
picture tilled The Evening Trees, the still sad twilight envelops the evening. The uneasiness and distance is created between humans by invading objects almost as if they have a life of their own. The stillness of her humans is contrasted by the highly animated space surrounding them consisting of ordinary day-to-day objects. In many ways her flying figures are reminiscent of Chagall with whom the artist claims to have an affinity. "He (Marc Chagall) also draw heavily from Russian folklore, specifically Jewish myths, yet what he was celebrating was not a ritualistic approach to religion. It was an earthy, optimistic peasant's eye view of reality, which could accommodate fantasy as well as hard fact".

It is this ability to incorporate ordinary day-to-day events with a magical life, letting imaginations soar, which levels that inexplicable meaning to Singh's works. As Ebrahim Alkazi puts it succinctly. "Are these a child's mutated recollection of past experiences, or are their representation of the immediate present? Aspects of time, post and present, of dream and reality, of here and there, of presence and absence—all partake of the same ambiguity as the characters themselves. The future is now even as we speak, yet in a trice this 'now' has already receded into the post. The fascination of Arpita's
work lies in the fact that they, in their laughing way, evoke the riddle of human existence, its concrete reality and at the same time its intangibility: its clarity and its meaningless, its reality and its baffling precariousness.”

Images that are familiar to us are shown afresh in a content which gives them a new meaning. Her Child bride With Swan for instance, stands forlorn, a dazzling stark of yellow in crowded landscape of cards, people and aeroplanes, swirling around her in a sea of blue and red. Her Woman Sitting on Tin Trunk is a desolate study of a woman dressed in bright orange and holding a bouquet of flowers, her flamboyant appearance contrasting with her own vulnerability. A subterranean kind of wit surfaces in Girl Smoking a cigarette where a girl smokes innocuously while all kinds of ominous mythological figures hover around her, women watching a plane is poignant portrayal of a middle-aged woman watching planes flying where there is a strong suggestion of sexual gratification. In women in Floral Dress, there is a disturbing vulnerability in the woman who sits still and iconic, starting at the viewer while the flowers and stripes on her dress take on an ominous life, almost overwhelming the wearer. Some times the textures and pattern of the surrounding space take on a threatening quality isolating the figure as in A Man in the Room.
It seems pertinent to ask at this juncture whether Singh views herself as a woman painter. For her the term itself is one which makes no difference to her work. She says, “I am a painter. To call me a woman painter does not have a special meaning. Whatever I do is as a woman because I am a woman. My whole development has been as a woman in a specific society during a specific period. I do not know what it is like to paint as a man. Therefore, it seems strange to even say that I am a woman painter. I would just like to establish myself as painter.” By implication the emphatic closeness she feels to woman makes her often draw upon them as the subject of her study.

We are often reminded of folk forms while looking at Singh’s work in the brilliance of her colour, in the simple, almost native configuration, and not the least because of the wit and homour. There are important differences, however, in that her forms do not have a ritualistic, repetitive, pattern where the role of the figure can be predicted in advance. In the narrative folk tradition of India no story never ends, for that would mean death. Each character unfolds its own tale and that in turn another tale, till the whole seems a complex web of events. And that is what happens to Singh’s work when she unfolds the story of the Kidwai family.

The family is organically united through a web of lines around the
death of Ayesha Kidwai’s grandmother. The serrated lines unite and separate each member. At the looms the portrait of the patriarch, the missing member who is still present. If the death of the oldest member brings the family together, the youngest in the family, Ayesha is the subject at acute observation. Her persona with its shadow and reflections forms a whole community around her perhaps her internal family. According to Singh “I chose this family because I know all its member very well and can articulate whatever I want to express through them. In away this family is a microcosm of contemporary India for me,” Ayesha a Muslim married out of the community introducing into her life the conflict between religion, between diverse cultures, generation and the sexes which is one way or the other is the life sage of most families in India.

A gun-toting Durga made in October 1993 raised on unseemly controversy, all the more ironic because this was one of her less successful images. When asked by the Calcutta magazine Desh to make an image for their Durga Puja annual, Singh in the aftermath of communal riots which had swept the country, made a Durga holding a pistol in one hand. This created a whiplash of fury among a certain section of believers who felt that the iconic image had been vandalized. When called upon to make a statement by the editor of the weekly, Singh wondered what the fuss was
about as she had painted the way she usually did. The gun-tating Durga clad in a white sari in combat with a man in dark glasses was, if any things, lateral statement and one which strained her painterly strength. The multiple registers had been oversimplified and Singh seemed to be crossing that them wedge between making a statement and painterly linguistics.

ANUPAM SUD

Anupam Sud is one of the finest printmakers among the new generation in India. Although she has taken up paintings on large canvas, mostly in acrylic, her intaglio prints still hold their sway over her paintings. Anupam has been experimenting in different areas of the graphic medium, but what stand out is apparently her effortless infusion of different intaglio processes with screen-printing and lithography.

There is little of the narrowly ‘feminist’ in her total oeuvre. Instead, her firmly drawn figuration of men and women draw our attention to the general human situation and to psychological tension between man and society. A large part of the charm of her intaglio and mixed-media prints lies in her treatment of chiaroscuro.

Born in Hoshiarpur in Punjab in 1944, Anupam did her diploma in Fine Arts form the College of art, New Delhi in 1967. She specialized in printmaking. With a British Council scholarship she studied print-making

Anupam Sud attended five print workshops, two of which were conducted under Paul Lingren and Carol Summers (1970-1974). In 1989 she represented India at the Printmaking workshops of Asian countries at Fukoka Art Museum Japan and worked in professional workshops in New York and Berkeley (196). Anupam sud has won awards 19 times between 1969 and 1995: In 1990, the Centre for International Contemporary Art
(CICA), New York, awarded her with a study and travelling fellowship in Printmaking in the USA, and she won the president of India’s Gold Plaque at the Women’s international Art Exhibition, New Delhi (1975), Special Award at the International Print Biennale, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal (1995) and the President of India’s silver Plaque at the 65th – 66th All India Annual Art Exhibition.

THE ART OF ANUPAM SUD

Anupam’s concern is explicity with the figurative, but the figurative is more than a mean for exploring the narrative, the epic or the human predicament. For her the human figure becomes an end in itself. She brushes aside queries and distinction between the naked and the nude, with reference to John Berger, “I focus on the nude for the sheer beauty of the body—that’s all. For me it is much more vulgar to highlight or expose certain areas of the body, I remove the long hair on the female torso because there should be no distraction.”

The human figure, stripped to its essence, is revealed, as much as the naked truth can be revealed. This process is the reverse of that ritual discarding of clothes by the cabaret artist, retaining of course, the hat, the shoes, the jewellery and perhaps a veil, becomes entertainment, to tantalise and mock the viewer, concealing as much as it reveals. In contrast the work
of Anupam Sud becomes a gradual but logical process of uncovering and unmaking the body and identity of the self.

We might trace the birth of human forms through thirty years of work. Initially, the artist’s obsession is with the idea of giving birth. In Earth Mother (1967) embryonic forms struggle to emerge from within the swollen primordial womb-cave. Often enough, these figures are all arms and legs, impregnated within the enclosure of a rock like formation, or they are found in subterranean passages in her Time Capsule (1969). They are filed away in cabinets in the dark interiors of the Museum (1972). They flounder, swimming through the waters of Whirlpool (1971) which could be taken to be the primordial water of destruction at the end of the world, Pralaya, the ruptured waterbag from the uterus. Faceless and anonymous as they are, these figures engage in bestial rituals like those by the hie onymus Bosch in his Garden of Delights, burrowing through anthills or eating thorugh sprouted beans in the Box (1971) where only shafts of sunlight penetrate into the gloom.

In torsos that achieve such perfect balance, the absence of the face makes a statement, as in a work titled Composition (1972) which was exhibited at the British Biennial. This was the first occasion when she handled a 20 x 40 inch etching plate. Centrestage, a man reaches out to
play a game of marbles while the woman groups her way in the shadows of the picture frame. The importance of the hand as a tool had already been stressed by Anupam. Now she suggests that the hand forms the start of this composition, being used to press down memories on paper from the past.

On her return from London, her figures are possessed of a singular quality of immobility, they are like studies of still life. The head, if and when it emerges, is entirely faceless or cast in shadow. The subject matter is enigmatic, raising doubts about the identity of the person who, might be prominently placed but who remains passive and often victimized. Consider her three etching titled You (1973), Biography of a Crime (1973), and Homepage to mankind (1977), Each of this is imbued with a sense of undisclosed mystery. The accusing finger You is placed in the immediate foreground of the picture, painting to the figure of a man, suited and seated behind a desk. The collar merges into the windowpanes beyond—there is no head and no clear identity. Yet the situation and the person are real, a cigarette lies on the desk, unsmoked.

A broken white line descends diagonally, vivisecting the man into two fragments. The dotted line is a device improvised by Anupam, she suggests, to balance the composition. Yet, it also introduces an element of doubt about the meaning of the picture and the fragmented (or double)
identity of the man, Etchings form the mid-1970s carry and autobiographical content. Scathing irony reinforces that sense of stark nakedness in her work of this phase. The most powerful is her Homepage to Mankind which casts the muted shadows of the Taj Mahal into the background as the referent to that all-enduring symbol of love. In the foreground rises the human witness and victim of this love of today and yesterday. Standing upon a monitoring box, his powerful frame is strapped to blood transfusion—to ensure the continuity of life and render him captive. Ours is an age of reliance upon machines. The artist’s mother, a woman of indomitable strength and wrongly diagnosed to have cancer, was reduced through medication to an invalid for the remaining fourteen years of her life. The artist offers one comment: The figure is all patched up—as good as new! Even the brain is being monitored...

Three portraits from the 1970s exist in oil, of her father, her mother, and her mentor Jagmohan Chopra. These testify to Anupam’s competence in rendering realistic studies. They also suggest that she deliberately chose to work in the graphic medium, allowing for a combination of the real and the unreal as construed by the artist. “It was a sort of challenge: to work in a medium for which there was little encouragement provided in India, or in fact, any professional equipment.” In 1967, when Anupam
graduated from the College of Art, Group Eight, a professionals group of printmakers in Delhi, was founded at the initiative of Jagmohan Chopra. Almost thirty years later, she still works on the etching plate, while heading the department of graphics at the College of Art.

The difference between oil paintings in colour and etching in black and white is relevant to Anupam’s sensibility and to her choice of subject. Black and white pictures possess an element of the austere; by converting the image into shadow and light—thereby invoking, at times, the values of good and bad. The artist employs these effects to great advantage, by using chiaroscuro to heighten difference and summon up the psychic qualities in her figures. We begin to sense alienation, the “otherness” in images of men and women who, on the face of things, are portrayed in “real life” situations. The situations now are commonplace; but the titles to her work take on a double-edged, even haunting meaning. Thanks to Power (1976) may just refer to a fan purring noiselessly in a room where people languish on a hot day; but it may refer to a different kind of power, that controls and executes and the privilege of having electricity. The Ride introduces a man and a woman together on a bicycle along a road that seems to go nowhere, but which contains a road sign at the end announcing “No Limits”. What does the “Ride” mean for this couple, apart from being an uneventful
journey-till they suddenly come upon this sign. The Ride compels us to reconsider the “normal situation” no matter how common-place it might appears, as the artist probes below the surface appearance of people and things. She comments: Marriage brings about a state of mind. Everything which was earlier declared wrong is now permissible. I have never seen myself as bride. My sister, on the other hand, fantasized about marriage.’ This comment significantly establishes that she views her images at this stage of her work as an outsider.

The focus in Sud’s prints of the 1980s is on figure in the context of their urban environment. Streets, pavements of cement, broken walls, barbed wire, and battered lampposts-elements which define and circumscribe human existence-begin to form an essential part of her vocabulary. These elements bring about a play between light and shade, between life and death, as her commentary on people who live precariously at the edge of survival. Some figures assumes a heroism as they rise above their situations. Take her rickshaw puller in the etching Way to Utopia (1980) who is charged with superhuman energy. “The rickshaw puller becomes a symbol; he takes you from one destination to another”....

At the same time in the 1980’s Anupam embarks on a series titled Dialogue. In essence, these explore the subtleties, the nuances, the give-
and-take in human relationships. *Dialogue* (1984) depicts a couple seated before a ramshackle house which is distanced from them by barbed wire. They share no sense of intimacy or belonging; their attitude is one of resignation. Another of the Dialogue series, on the other hand, is concerned with a different kind of relationship. In one of her few open landscapes, two men are seated on a bench, deeply engrossed in conversation.

It must be noticed immediately that the artist’s depiction in *Persona* does not subscribe to the ideals or aesthetic norms of the woman and mirror conventional image which is abundantly used in Rajput and Hill painting nor would this be characteristic of her body of work and her conviction. By contrast to that convention, we note that her woman stands, not viewing herself in the mirror, but defiantly with the mirror placed behind her. Her gaze is not to look into herself but to look out of the picture and confront the viewer. Again, this confrontation becomes more complex— the onlooker confronts her naked figure but not her face—for the face is masked. Or is it in the process of being unmasked?

There are layers of meaning that confound in Anupam’s *Ceremony of Unmasking* (1990). Here the woman is released from her self fascination for her own image. It would be relevant to mention here a series of four recent college sketches by the artist, which are autobiographical in
content and most revealing. There is no sense of timidity here in depicting herself. In one of them she projects herself in profile, naked to the waist, holding up a mask screen just face-to project herself, to “play a role” of the many roles that she has mentioned.

DIFFERING SIMILARITIES WITH OTHER WOMEN ARTISTS

The remarkable thing in Arpana’s painting is that she presents realities of our life with the images which are simple and communicating. Her metaphorical imagery not only colours beauty but also gives it a meaning. In her painting, everything has a meaning. Every show she brings in a meaningful way, exhausting her emotions, passions, and innate energies. Arpana’s style is a synthesis of modern and Indian miniature paintings. Synthesising two poles apart she has involved a new language, a new born reality more correctly in language of art a fictional reality whenever one had a chance to see her created fictional realities an inner voice says “Is’t it an affirmation of another reality”. Arpana’s Between Duality series explains it well enough. In memory two paintings of that series Rites of Time and Great Departure were good example of above mentioned truth.

The realities affirmed and reaffirmed are ours as much as hers. We are living in between dualities and will continue living till the great
departure. Through her work it seems that she is very much entangled in dualities, dualities of life and death. Subjects concerning social and personal issue has been painted a lot but as she matures she moves more close to herself. Thus time, Enlightenment, Sohni, Nanak like subjects come out at forefront. Outer realities are disappearing paving the way for inner realities to appear. She is turning towards metaphysics of art to explore human dignity metaphysically. In the age of the donism and optimism this movement of Arpana’s art is more rational than rationality in strict sense. Only on this ground art comes closer to nature.

One can not say that these paintings have no social value, for now she is painting hidden irrationality of a seemingly rational world. She is now bringing to light most important things of life.

Arpana’s recent work brings the metaphysical aura with seemingly tranquil exterior but having explosive quality not in terms of emotions but in relation to the antagonistic forces behind those emotions. Look at the quality of only two painting Day and Night, and Creature and Destroyer the time appears in the work of art as its inner time. Here this inner time is more important for it is that abstract image which when get blown on canvas becomes a historical event. Revealing inner time of consciousness is not easy but Arpana seems to conceptualise it beautifully. Her paintings
philosophies time in a different way other than what other philosophers of
religion said.

Time for her is an absolute temporality, it is like dark space where
entities are being born. Time is space itself, her paintings give a sense of
time which is though in constant flux and has lordship over everything
appears in relative terms. How can one overcome the relativity of time?
She questions in her paintings that if time is universal than how Buddha
could overcome time? She has painted Buddha under the scissors of time.
Perhaps Arpana has experienced this truth that mediative consciousness
often transcends the time experience but it doesn’t mean that time ceases to
be. May be he is not experiencing time as it often happens to those people
who are engaged in any creative activity. Experience of timelessness is a
kind of forgetfulness this she knows that’s why she put Buddha under
scissors of time. Arpana’s recent paintings are important regarding spiritual
art and spiritualization art. Spiritualization of art is for her never ending
phenomenon. Spirituality in art is an event.

In Arpana’s work the happening/eventuality of this event. Her black
background of the paintings provide the ground for the sacred event to take
place. This taking place of event on the black background is very spiritual
and metaphysical. Black is being used metaphorically for time, flat black
surface is time which reveal event, make it happen and sustain it.

Regarding metaphysics of art, Arpana’s use of black is very relevant. Her use of black is not passive, it is more active than other colours is sustains colours and forms actively on this black surface which looks as though it is the infinite space, time itself! Images take birth. This emergence, this rising from the very depth of time is an event, a manifestation of the essence which masters refer as pure point. But event never takes place consciously rather it comes out of Qualitative Leap of consciousness. This leap led her from consciousness of art to language of art in the reach of trace of truth. Now she no longer believes in the expression in traditional sense for her expression means opening of another reality. In this opening expression traverses all logic which are rooted in the hitherto metaphysical core. Imaginative quality of her work tries to overcome mediations of ideas. Her work tended to forswear spirit and idea to penetrate non-ideal layers of art. Arpana’s recent move is important in the sense that she is becoming more spiritual but not in a negativist way. Her saying that “I wanted to imbue black with positivity, because black has obsessed me as a colour, for the last few years, I don’t know why”, rightly explains her non-structural approach. The spiritualization of her work of art tends to cross sophistication of spiritualism in art in this very
sense. Beyond conformist spiritualism she has taken altogether a different step.

**STYLE OF ANJOLIE ELA MENON**

The choice of objects and images in the paintings of Anjolie Ela Menon constitutes much of the humdrum and the prosaic that exists in everyday life. Their transformation into symbols of poignancy and evocation is through the manner in which they are wrapped up in mystery and an archaic beauty: the ordinary acquires a powerful visual vocabulary. While objects leap from the prosaic to the poetic, personal links to people, emotions, moods and locations also get transformed into the general, even while they retain some of the original quality.

Themes and motifs that often appear in Menon’s works are never the result of that ephemeral spontaneity that dies out once a certain state of mind or mood disappears. Her use of themes and motifs has sprung from their lasting attraction and their visual potential as seen through shape, significance and impact. These concepts require the capacity to be transferred from an emotional or subconscious reverence to a creative reality. Such a reality in Anjolie’s care is spontaneously evoked – not the spontaneity which evaporates like a passing breeze but the inspiration which is based on certain basic truths important to her and therefore vital.
Both image and technique in Anjolie’s care have undergone a long and purposeful Journey. During her student years prior to her departure for Paris in 1960, her paintings (mainly portraits) were dominated by flat areas of thick bright colour with sharp outlines painted “with all the vigour and brashness of extreme youth”, showing diversly the influence of Van Gogh, the expressionist, Modigliani, Amrita Sher-Gil, and Hussain. There was as yet no manifestation of the subtle gradation of tone and texture which personified her later paintings. While in Paris she met Francesco Toledo, a Mexican painter, who introduced her to the concept of five layered surfaces and the textures possible there in. It is exactly this method of application which was to gradually become responsible for the surface quality of her paintings.

The sleek black crow entered Anjolie’s paintings during the 1970s. It is not imbued with the conventional connotations of doom and death but with her own interpretation of its signification. Life in a small flat in Bombay during that period with its environment stripped off lower and foliage made the ubiquitous crow a symbol of nature, a friendly surrogate. The same benign quality is reflected in other creatures that domesticate themselves-lizards, dogs and goats. The lizard is visually effective because of its reptilian slimness and the cure of its long tail. In the painter’s works it
acquires the male gender, the voyeur gazing from unseen corners. When placed in conjunction with high-breasted women that populate her canvases, the lizard's impact is never placid. Through this and other combinations Anjolie's references move from the display of innocence to unrequired desire or to the invasion of privacy and space. Dogs and puppies conjure up the frolic and play of childhood, an innocence not yet ruptured by life's realities. Empty chairs and charpoys speak of exactly these realities, of an adolescent's loss of her mother and of her father in later years. She continues to paint the unattainable or the intangible which is lost for ever, symbolized through skies or distant sails, balloons, and kites.

Her superb technique and paint application brings much to the haunting quality of her canvases. This is a fact which most viewers take for granted since their interest lies more in the finished painting than in the process. But it is precisely those delicate layers of colour-transparent brown, olive green or Indian yellow, Prussian blue, indigo or terre-verte used in a specific manner, which land the mystery or brooding quality to her images. Levels of memory and the subconscious achieve their visual success because of the harmony brought to them through technique. Wrapped up as they are in mists of translucency (fine glazes of paints),
Anjolie’s images and motifs establish themselves first through bright opaque paint which later gets altered through the ambivalence of transparent glazes which cover the painting and provide the surface effects. The clarity and assertion of bright opaque paint is very different from the dark transparency that engulfs them. For anjolie, an overall bright palette would signify the ordinariness of the present, stripped of mystery and the creative imagination and therefore of no interest to her. But the fresh green of Malabar, and other paintings of the 1980s, evoked a bright palette. She is above all, a colourist.

Recently, Anjolie moved away from the deeply intense palette to experiment with lighter, brighter shades, even though the images have yet to make a transition. More recently, making a complete change of medium, she has created Mutations (1996), a series of computer-aided images which draw on the vast body of her paintings to create permutations of images that are known and yet new.

**STYLE OF ARPITA SINGH**

At first glance, Arpita Singh’s world seems timeless, unrushed and serene. But there is trouble in paradise, and the artist’s unflinching eye refuses to ignore it. The tranquility created by earthy colours and balanced composition is invaded by daggers, guns, cars, arrows, aeroplanes,
uprooted palm trees and revered hands. The objects are often labeled with meticulous block letters both augmenting and questioning their power through naming.

Singh’s recurrent protagonist is a full-bodied, mature Indian woman, not too unlike the artist herself in appearance. Sari-clad, naked or partially dressed, the woman often displays emblematic objects, drinks tea or converses with her male consort, but remains the centre of her universe. She is always surrounded by a thick tangle of diverse images from worldly and political life.

Singh has developed a unique process in her works on paper: she paints with water-colour and gouache on heavy paper, abraids the surface with sandpaper, repaints, sand and then paints again. The slightly blurred images reveal her intentionally rough-hewn pentimenti and ultimately, created softened, classicized balance. She approaches oils with a similar responsiveness to the materials, vigorously painting wet into wet with a fully charged brush. Painting in oil, Singh can explore a larger scale and greater compositional complexity, but the resulting images are slightly harder and more chiseled, and she sacrifices the tropical languor and sensual live of the works on paper.

In a series of works exhibited in 1994, Singh had recovered her
composure and juxtaposed her encounter with violence with beauty and humour which made it all the more poignant. In a large oil, woman plucking flowers, a woman bends to pluck flower in the far end of the lake-like garden. The shimmering blue metamorphoses into lotus shapes edged with a red glaze. The aquamarine surface is broken by brown triangles which intersperse the blue like sexual symbols. Slowly the realization dawns that at the far edge stands a man painting his pistol at the woman. The distilled flickering blue evenly matches the beauty of the movement with the brutality of life.

If the preciousness of life is juxtaposed by its ugliness, the painter chooses the monumental scale of the canvas to bring this about. Her dexterous use of water colour when translated into oil has not always been successful and she confesses to not being able to use the medium with the same facility as her water colours. In oils, Singh negotiates the surface with colour rather than with signs and in this series the colour blue lands her the facility she is searching for the varied textures and tones in A Dead Man on the street: Is it you Krishna? from an equal counterpoint between levels of reality paralleling her water colours. A man stretches dead across the surface, his body rippling with blue. Could it be that he is not dead but dreaming? An electric blue glides over the surface uniting the space
between dream and wakefulness. Four figures stand gazing over the body and also at themselves. Singh points out the blue God Krishna, for all his awesome feats, died an ordinary death. The dream or reality is a truism for everyone; for all the remarkable events in a man’s life, when he dies the end is ordinary, even important.

**STYLE OF ANUPAM SUD**

Anupam Sud works essentially and only with the body naked. A bold statement for a woman who in every way, by word, demeanour, and lifestyle, is modest and unassuming; who shuns publicity, and held her first major exhibition in 1989 after considerable persuasion and a gap of some eighteen years.

Anupam’s body of work possesses, its own intrinsic logic of development. This is a process in the search for identity, through a long journey over some thirty years; from anonymous embryonic forms, struggling to born through *Earth Motor*, to the superb mastery of torsos in her composition *tilled windows*, to the faceless, undisclosed mysteries of you and Homage to Mankind. Even when she turns to commenting on Indian society in those bold indelible images of *Darling, Get me a baby Mack!* and *Pick up Girls*, it is never the faces but the torsos and animated gestures which tells the story. The face remains immobile, passive, unused.
Comparative study

Chapter - 6

to expressing sentiment – even in her **Dialogue** series where the confrontation between man and woman requires expression. Finally it is only with her mask series that she turns to the face, and the face is now in the process of being unmasked.

Anupam responds “**My work is not about sexuality, people interpret my etching and ask me if they are about homosexuality or lesbianism, but I do not judge people on their sexual life. I like the human body when light falls upon it and modulates the form, the tonalities. It stimulate me and inspire me to work. It is not only the woman – it is also the man who. The male torso is the most perfect form.”**

Her reference to the male body becomes the most substantial argument against those who would see the latent eroticism in her depiction of women. Equally, perhaps more so in the 1980s, her work pivots around the male nude. Four year after her print of *Pickup Girls* is her etching titled **the Dice**, a viscosity print made at a workshop at Bhopal. Three men, naked to about three – fourth of the body, grow together as out of some common density which blends them. Yet each represents a different person with a different outlook: one looks for opportunity, the second gambles away his chances with dice, and the third contemplates the open to him,
while the facial features are sharp and aquiline, the bodies are superbly built and beautiful.

The second factor which argues against the deliciously erotic is the stark sense of austerity about her images. Her women are never projected against curtain drapes or potted plants or in the conventions of Indian art and poetics. The third factor is a more subtle device of technique, by which each of these torsos of men and women in The Dice or in Pickup Girls, is purposefully distanced from the spectator. Even in cases when the figures seem upfront and brutally close to the viewer as in The Grill (1988), he is summoned up behind bars, As the artist observes, “But who is behind the bars – you, or this man? There are always two sides to viewing a picture!”.

This also become her viewpoint of watching, reflecting notating that absurd combination of the real and unreal, of the bizarre and the common place. The artist herself, the commentator, remains detached and uninvolved in the situation. Indeed, it would seem an integral part of her personality to maintain this discreet distance – even through the subject may be a naked torso.

In her etching Persona (1988) Anupam resorts to a device where she purposefully returns to an age-old symbol of vanity. A woman naked stand
before a mirror holding up to herself a mask with just a pair of slits for the eyes to view the world. On the table before her lies a wig, to complete the disguise. It is not clear as to whether she is in the purpose of wearing the mask or of removing it. A face in the mirror reveals the shrunken older shroud of the woman.

The mask series by Anupam is a break through, to a more complete realization of the figure. With each step, she has come closer to arriving that “the stark, truth” is the sense of truth being revelation of the human form.

The common factor in all the four artists is feminism. They paint on different issues of women.

Arpana Caur’s work speaks with an eloquent intensity of the current state of woman’s off airs in India, resolutely refusing to look away from the many problems inherent in the present system, yet equally determined not to be defeated or overawed by them. If the experiences of Indian womanhood can be said to be the primary focus of her work, still her precisely formulated analysis of the rhythms of everyday life are so surely focused as to have equal validity when extended even further a field. Arpana is among those who believe that “A woman has a edge over a man in terms of sensitivity”. Gayatri Sinha states that, in her paintings, “
There is no hint of an expressive sexuality; woman and nature are both symbiotically tied in a circle of perceived threat and uncertain renewal.

Arts seeks to perfect the imperfections of reality; Anjolie’s painted women therefore continuously flaunt their desirability while seeking to be desired in term. The woman, like men, are normally presented frontally, large eyes averted, head turned at an angle like a lot of Romanesque sculpture. They are almost iconic in their stillness or perhaps the static quality of arms and legs is an indication of a certain weakness of the basic drawing in her paintings - a deficiency compensated by colour, composition and texture. The nude in her works has always vibrated with experiences that are intensely personal to woman who can also be “trapped in situations not often of their making”. Her nude figures also incorporate the female principle on various levels of suggestion – the Madonna (purity), the maternal (familial, the mother and child theme explored differently), and the sexual (erotica explored in its many hues); there is almost something naturalistic in the off repeated ideals female form full – breasted, voluptuous, and innocent looking.

Many of Arpita’s images portray a woman – centered world, none perhaps more beautifully then the spare water colour Five women (1977).
Against an olive-green ground bordered in yellow, Singh arranges her figures in two rows. The first to women are red outlines only, seen within circular frames that place them at one remove, as if in memory. Between them Singh interposes an airplane with three men inside, suggesting not merely travel but loss and the intrusion of a specifically male world and its mobilities into this close circle. From here the woman gains greater solidity, culminating in the final figure, obscured by drapery and accompanied by a great owl. Although the artist seems to depict five different women here (perhaps a family)?, some sort of chronological progression is suggested, some journey from hurt and loss to strength and wisdom.

Anupam’s works carry an explicit and concerned search for identity in her projection of women. In the etching provocatively titled **Pick up Girls** (1980) two girls naked, are engrossed in some game along a street pavement. This may be a game of marbles, or of dice, or possibly gambling for money. Electric lights from the windows above flood the street, silhouetting the figures of the woman so they appear more conspicuous as bold, intensely dark forms against poles of light. In the immediate foreground another female form emerges, to look at the street below. Her naked body is exquisitely modelled in chiaroscuro, but the face is obscured.
with her fine black hair blowing across, caressing the shoulders. In Anupam’s etchings, this is a woman’s world, and complete in itself.