Chapter 4
SYMBOLS IN CONTEMPORARY PAINTINGS
In India after the beautiful phase of Mughal and Rajput miniature paintings, the art of painting lost its charm. There is no school of art existed as such then from this lost charm or (darkness) there emerged an exciting and dazzling phase of modern art or the Renaissance in art.

"Abstraction appears in art with the desire to do away with traditional subject matter and liberate painting from its themes. Until the beginning of the twentieth century subjects tended to dominate art and were read by the spectator, often coming between him and the impact of the work as a visual object. Titles had a romantic message and even when they had no obvious meaning as in still lifes and landscapes, the viewer tended to appreciate the work by criteria such as faithfulness to nature. Art was less individualistic than it is today there was a consensus of ideas about what constituted art. Beauty in nature and beauty in art were related by verisimilitude. Thus when in the last
years of the 19th century the artist tried to create a new reality different from life he was generally misunderstood. But with the work of the impressionists, post-impressionists, Fauves and finally cubists we find certain new values being stressed which had nothing to do with the subject. Cubism may be considered the first major abstract phase it was brought about through distortion, the splitting of images and a rejection of the old content which was replaced by forms and values which were the new pictorial ends" (Jaya).

Inspired by these movements, the Indian artists started initiating the western style but this journey towards the west, prove invaluable. It was time for a pause and perhaps, a 'retreat'.

It was E.B. Havell and Anandacomaraswamy who's efforts brought Indian artists back to their roots. When Europe discovered the East for this inspiration which he got from our religious philosophy and sanskrit studies why not our own artists come back to their roots and rediscover the symbols. Our culture, religion,
mythology primitive folk art and tantric art had everything in it which an artist demands.

The most important artistic link between past and present consists in a number of decorative motifs, attributes and symbols motifs which regularly recur and can be shown to have remained constant throughout, although the message they carry may vary from epoch to epoch.

Indian artists were rich in symbolic motif in art. Indian artists afford to be always visionaries and mythic. Now what we find is the originality of work. The contemporary artists worked on every possibility and explored, each and every aspect of painting, and the result brought to us a wide range of brilliant artists. Some of Indian significant painters were influenced by the symbolic iconography of tantra art.

They derived assurance and sustinance from its methods of metaphorical and pictorial thinking.
**Rabindranath Tagore : Born in 1861**

Rabindranath was a gigantic figure in Indian literature. From 1875, poems, articles, lectures, stories and dramas had poured out of his pen, and his poetry with its musical cadences and haunting melodies had dominated the Bengali consciousness. His collection of poems are known as "Gitanjali" for which he received the Nobel prize for literature. This reward brought for him worldwide recognition.

"It was only late in life that the creative urge in him played with lines and colours and which took definite design and shape under the spell of his genius" (Venkatachalam).

He was the first modern artist of India. In Rabindra's view, full freedom is must for an artist then only he break out in his own way, whatever forms he like to work on or with. Rhythm is the essence of poetry and his emphasis was on Rhythm.
Though he did not receive any training in drawing or painting, art was in his blood and the 1st inspiration was a paragraph which was published in 'The modern Review' in which the writer talks about the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Jung, which helped the artists in expressing the suppressed imaginative ideas.

The second inspiration was the exhibition of modern art at Calcutta in 1922. Among the works of modern artists, the work of two artists inspired him most are the painting of Paul Klee "Passing through an open door" and Wassily Kandinsky's 'creation'. Then in 1926 Rabindranath went on to Italy, France, Germany and England.

His art was basically line drawing. He started with horizontal crossing and while playing with the lines some creative forms appeared, sometimes he added colors to the forms and sometimes he left those forms as it is. And as a poet his interest in calligraphy was remarkable, he himself state. "My pictures are my verification in lines."
His designs are calligraphic. The sketches of landscape in colour inks are amazing. The sketches of Rabindranath are like child art but there is grace, movement and rhythm in his lines and curves. Even his unfinished work has this "rhythmic significance of form".

In the beginning he used only fountain pen. Then he started using coloured ink. When Rabindranath exhibited in Germany after Paul Klee, the name of other two artists who's afford a work has similarities with those to Rabindranath are Edvard Munch and Picasso.

Rabindranath did not know what he is going to draw, nor does he preplanned his colour scheme.

"He allows his sensibilities a free rein, paint in a trance, a trance which has all the acuteness, the visual definiteness of dreams." The final identification a woman, a bird, a deer was often a last minute 'condensation' while the form itself was almost entirely the product of unconscious forces" (Archer).
His work was well praised by foreign art critics as serious contribution in modern art. His style and manner are definitely his own though a general influence is obvious and noticeable, like the use of bold distortions, freedom from shading and perspective, the use of irrational forms. Besides all these borrowings his own phrase "to be naturally Indian insensibily, Indian attitude to art, religion and poetry."

Tagore's paintings had for Indian art the same kind of revolutionary and vitalizing function as Henry Moore's sculpture has for English. Both were subtly expressive of their times. Both seem to involve a complete break with every immediate predecessor. Both suggest a new start, yet both can still be fitted into their own respective national tradition.

*Muhammad Abdur Rahman Chughtai:*

Chughtai is a Persian, he is of the Tartar mughals lineage and from the family of master builders of the Pearl mosque of Delhi and the Taj Mahal of Agra. Two
important books of his paintings are *Nagish-i-Chughtai* and *Muraqqa-e-Chughtai*. He visited Europe twice and held exhibitions in London and Paris.

Persian by tradition and mughal by birth, he had two dreams in life related to his art, and they were to render the intimitable poetry of the two great poets, Ghalib and Omar Khayyam, in line and colour.

Chughtai study Persian tradition of painting and he retained the distinctive mood and posture of the Persian tradition but gave his picture a special quality of his own in lovely colour combination, in delicious lines that seem to be less lines of painting than of some in audible poetry made visible, in folds drapery.

He has chosen water colour as his medium. His lines flow tenderly, gracefully and there is an eternal charm in the draperies and ornaments which he used for his female figures. What we find in his art is the decorative element, his rhythmic lines, his treatment of colours, fineness of his work, a perpetual look of
elegance.

"Chughtai expresses himself by forming a line of thought connecting it with all the objects in any particular picture" (Razia).

In doing so he achieved a perfect harmony of line. Western critics criticize his work as oriental or imaginative.

The remoteness which he created from the realism and deliberately cultivated a imaginative atmosphere for his pictures.

This quality of Chughtai's work is the mission of oriental art to create and attract the admirer towards the truth of imagination.

"In Chughtai's painting one is conscious of the unique combination of three elements, the actual present, a most prophetic vision and a revival of the past. The faces of chughtai's women contained both promise and history at the same time" (Razia).
When he was only 29, he brought out a superbly illustrated edition of the Divan of the famous urdu poet, Ghalib, and named (Muraqqa-i-Chughtai)."

Ghalib was the poet philosopher of the East and a symbol of culture in which chughtai has his roots.

He also did, etchings, his etching work is also very delicate and interesting "Dead shrines". He did abstract subject romantic subject, landscapes, festivals.

Chughtai found his motif everywhere, and his pictures seem to whisper that there is always an escape from this sorbids world into a wider and more beautiful one. Shy and sensitive, gentle and strong.

Some of his finest master pieces are: 'life', 'The Extinguished Flame', 'The song offering', 'vanity', 'The Hermit', 'Sunder valley', 'Radha and Krishna'.

Chughtai is the artist, etcher, designer and a talented writer. His works are greatly admired by almost all the great European painters, critics and new papers hailed him "as a unique messenger of beauty from the
orient". Few Indian artists have won such appreciations in Europe as Rahaman Chughtai.

**Syed Haider Raza**: Most significant talent in contemporary Indian painting. Born at Barbaria, a village of Madhya Pradesh in 1922. First he was admitted to the Govt. high school of Arts and four years later to the Bombay school of Art. He did his diploma in 1947 from Bombay art school. Son of a forest warden, lived in the midst of the densest forest of M.P.

Raza studied numerous books on Indian art, visited museums, as a passionate pilgrim travelled to Spain, Italy, Switzerland, England, Belgium and the Netherlands and what attracted him most is the art of Byzantine and the artists who's work inspired him most are Gauguin, Cezanne and Klee.

In India he executed a large number of gouoches and water colors in an expressionist style descriptive of the landscape and of life in difference parts of India.
In Bombay he founded a 'progressive group' with Husain, Padamsee Souza and other young modern painters. In 1950, he was awarded a scholarship by the French government and on his departure for France, Raza was one of the most advanced artists in India.

After living for several years in Paris, Raza had so well understood the latest phases of modern French art as if he is the integral part of it. But the nature of his art is half oriental and half rooted in his native traditions.

In 1956, he was awarded the 'Prise de la Critique'. This award is given to the front rank of the school of Paris. Now he was considered the most advanced artist in the east and west.

The first important and constructive quality of his work is his colours in painting. His medium predominates water colour which is seen in his landscape of central India Rajasthan and Kashmir.
The second quality is an imagined formal architecture and this feeling of architecture has remained in most of the Raza's paintings today shows the roofs and facades of old horses scenes in the city or more often in the villages.

In Barnett D. Conlan words "Raza has come to raise these forms to the level of symbols or signs which convey to profound poetry."

In India he paint in water colour, gouache and tempera. In France he changed his medium, because his inspirations wanted expression in a more suitable medium which is oil, so he shift to oil paints.

The present phase of Raza show a violent transmutation bursting forth in a spontaneous over flow of powerful colour of vermilion, persian blue viridian instinct with a life created by the colour themselves.

Color has become both form and subject in his present phase. Many of his pictures look like divided compartments, broken up into regular squares. Raza
himself is very much against the logic of abstract art. May be this is the reason why his art is firmly rooted in nature even though the painting is empty of all human references. He is very much concerned about the material quality of the painting that is the texture of the canvas. Raza is the standard bearer of a new world wide art.

K.C.S. Paniker: Paniker was born at Coimbatore in 1912, and before he joined the Madras School of Arts, he was a telegraph operator and insurance salesman. He has held successful shows of his work at Delhi and Madras. He is now the chief instructor of painting in the Madras School of Arts and crafts. His paintings are displayed in exhibitions of modern Indian Painting in Eastern Europe, Japan, Turkey and in Madras, Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi. He has held many one man shows at India house London. The Galerie R.
"From his early evocative landscapes and renderings of social situations to his present Paul Klee like calligraphic drawings of mysterious hieroglyphs. The art of Painter has registered a total transformation. The symbolism is validated only as its images cohere in an emotive pattern, its associative references, whether as magic or rebial or as sheer echoes of primitive impulsion would be wholly irrelevant to its appraisal as art" (Ramachandra).

His ways of arranging form is very unusual, but he is very confident on each occasion to express himself in such unusual ways.

The line is almost everything in Paniker's recent work and the line is of an intense and searching nature. What is being search out in these pictures is not an easy thing to find. The solution of this issue lies between drawing and the picture that is the notion of three dimensional linear space. This was advanced and applied by the renaissance painters in the rule of
perspective, the pure theory of which the cubists abstracted later on. To avoid this problem or issue he stop landscape painting.

"Rather than solidify the free space with the straight line structures of perspective or with regular blocks of colour, he made it into a fluid thing held up with a distribution of highly accented, broken and curling lines" (Josef).

While doing so one also gets irregular edges of colour which increases the unconventional possibility of abstraction, water colour as a medium prove excellent for creating some very fresh and fluid experience. The same nervous line worked well in figure drawing also.

For drawing a landscape or figure or a group, one has to use straight line structure, because broken accented line shows things that are abstract of which we have no sensual evidence. So he denied his drawing the convenience of the images.

If one is to rely on images, as one conventionally does, for making the lines of ones drawing to cohere,
drawing became some thing to which a thing other wise known can be reduced to."

Paniker in his 'work' and symbols' pictures reversed this role and attempted with his drawing to bring into being unknown bodies and substances.

Paniker set a wholly new concept in art, that, there exists a drawing paradigm without the image. He established a relationship between drawing and body which is purely pictorial.

In Ramachandra view A work of art has meaning only to the extent it arouses and draws. It is by this criterion that the curiousities of Paniker can qualify as art.

The symbols must emerge as a necessity of the creative urge and not as a hallmark of an art noueau.

*Jeram Patel*: Born at Sojitra, Kaira

Distract 1930. Studied drawing and painting

at the J.J. School of art 1950-55. Did typography and publicity design from central

All thoughts of Jeram is figurative, all expression semantic. Most of the images he takes from nature and human being rather than from man made things. In Jeram view the energy which we experience is from nature. He is not at all interested in colour he himself said that colour to me is a very misleading thing.

The human being is a part of nature, so a portion of the human being is a portion nature. I combine and gather the image, put energy into it, to make it more alive on the surface.

We find a kind of simile or similarly in his work between machines and birds. He used different material
on canvas paint, metal, nails, wood, blow torch, paper, ink, pen, brush, fevical, knife etc.

From 1962 to 1975 he worked in wood but single hand handling of wood is quite difficult so he switched over to drawing with black ink. He also used colours in his early painting. Mostly yellow and red. Red colour he used as a field, a symbol of energy and not as a colour. In his own view.

Art is no more a valid programme, it is like music which has nothing to offer in our time. The experience of valid art how you or I or anyone encounter it, how you enter its world and unravel its destiny depends on what you mean by art whether you call it art or anything else.

**J. Sultan Ali**: A figurative painter being in Delhi for nearly a decade. Shown in several important annual exhibitions in Delhi known for his water colours. There is nothing especial in his work except sincerity towards his work. This sincerity helped him
a lot in shaping him as a serious and convincing figurative painter. He was basically decorative both in conception and treatment. One reason for this could perhaps be his preoccupation with texture design. His painting are shown with the men and women of the country side and the southern coast line with which he is familiar.

"These stoic, able bodied men and women, the sinewy fisher folk and their pet animals and birds came again and again into his ken. His preoccupation with these elements is so intense and consistent that he now rendered them almost to the point of symbolism" (Krishnan).

In his work we find the peculiar optimism of the rural folk and their down to earth character. Started with water colour gradually be changed his medium to oil paint.

There is a greater fusion of design and colour, line and form which was lacking in his earlier work.
But with the change of medium there is a greater freedom from technique. The background landscape of his painting is shown only as an indulgence, but in his recent paintings this background is sometimes overshadow the figures.

Biren De: was born on Oct. 8, 1926 and studied briefly at the Cormichael medical college, Calcutta, which he left to join, the city college of Art for a five years course, and now pursue a free lance vocation as a painter in Delhi. His pictures were shown at the Salon de Mai, Paris (1951), and in New Delhi.

Biren cerebral development to an abstract style from a very competent impressionist to a portraiture is distinctly phased. The thematic figure was shown in an exciting arrangement of significant form, which contain likeness to reality.

Presently in his work he uses a structural symbolism of solid bars of brush strokes. He was in
America as a full bright scholar in the early 60s and while in New York he encountered the best of contemporary paintings and sculptures. This introspection led him to feel like a stranger in rejection and to start a fresh, is the only need of that time. So he rejected both the figurative and the abstract.

After his return from New York. His first exhibition was held in 1961, he explore the concept of light, a tantric concept. What is there in his work is movement and dynamism. The painting "Dying Ogre" belongs to that time. This picture is a link or the point of departure.

"In his own words New York taught me many things and it is very important I could never paints like them. I had to be my self. The truth dawned upon me that every one, artist or ordinary man, must find his own way" (Krishnan).

Then his exciting series painting of light or energy came. The laters or the bursting seed. There is a visionary quality in his paintings, the light of the
frequent multi-pelated form, he conceived light as a nucleus, spreads, shoots and radiales but come back to the core light is the symbol of energy which activates life.

There is another tantric concept which he represent is a foetus surrounded by the five circles and the number five has a special significance that is "Pancha makaras". A black ring - black is not used as a colour but as a symbol of darkness (Andhakara) which can be dispelled by sight.

G.R. Santosh : Born in Srinagar in 1929 of a Kashmiri family studied painting, wearing and papier mache. Scholar at M.S. University of Baroda. He achieved early distinction as a poet in the Kashmiri language. Solo exhibitions held in India, America, Canada, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore, since 1953. National award in 1973 and Padma Shri in 1977, Won the Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection of
poems Besukh Rub in 1979 in Kashmiri, 
Author of a novel in urdu, "Samandar Pyasa Hai". His work won him world wide recognition particularly in Germany, Japan and Switzerland. He has held individual shows of his work at the New York, Delhi, Bombay and Srinagar.

Santosh started painting in the forties as a landscape painter and an admirer of Cezanne. In 1954-55 he was in Baroda under Bendre. In Bendre words Santosh its very easy to paint landscape, paint a figfure.

So Santosh started both the landscape and the figure in cuhistic style. Then he did a mixture of stylised figures and stylised landscape.

Due to the shortage of colour in our country he is doing impass to work. After visiting so many countries and seeing the work of different artist, he found that a spiritual content is lacking in his work and he stopped painting for two years.
"I struggled to find my roots, my images what was left to me? You know even the ragas have been put into painting so my tantric painting begun" (Marg).

There is a frequent appearance of the square, another important tantric symbol is trident, which is a patent Saivite symbol, the concept of Sakti, the use of black and white and black and red.

Santosh relate sex with happiness. Sex is an act of life and he regarded it as a symbol of all desire. Sex and desires are never means of self realisation.

There universe is Sakti, Natures manifestations are themselves ritual, operating in distinct cycles, with an unbroken rhythm and confinity. Squares in Santosh canvas is like a window and black colour suggest an enormous feeling of void.

Sex is elevated to the level of transcendestat experience. I take the human form, in its dual male and female aspects in sexual union, in a state of unalloyed fulfilment, caught in a trance. I try to capture this intensity order and what is regarded as
yogic discipline.

**Maqbool Fida Husain**: M.F. Husain was born at Sholapur in Maharashtra in 1951 and studied at the Indore school of art he first set up as a designer of film hoardings and furniture and toys. Today a very successful painter, he has been almost invariably represented in every exhibition of contemporary Indian art held at Tokyo, London, New York, Japan, China. In India he has participated in every contemporary exhibitions and won many awards. Held several individual shows in Zurich, Prague, Frankfurt, Rome, Tokyo and in India at Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta.

He works with both water and oil colours, in the beginning he executed the painting of human figures, natural scenes, village and general life.

"His art is studied with symbolic images that are introduced naturally and in continual juxta position with
the more explicit images. These symbols are not he read in any literal sense. They are to be comprehended as they are painted, intuitively, with their own fluid logic" (Geeta).

The symbols are generally taken from the traditional pictorial conventions and mythology, a bird in a cage a lamp, a cactus, a spider, an art spread palm etc.

Then Husain is able to create personal myths that are provocative intimate incursions into the unconscious.

His interest in calligraphy, in urdu poetry, in folk and in cinema shows his personal temperamental restlessness and desire for change.

Broadly we can divide his painting into three categories (1) The beginning (2) The strife (3) And the Verge.

The earliest painting of 1940s and early 1950s were important for their relative iconoclasm", themes
were especially taken from the rural life example of his early work are "Potters" 1947, Holi 1951.

His principle motif was figure and female figures were beautifully depicted in his work. The second phase from about 1953 often referred as Husain's 'folk' period. There were innovation in search of a style. He painted a variety of themes based on village motifs, wooden toys, murals etc.

In his early work he break the body into facets and the poses of figures are angular and flat, the figures are outlined in black. The decrease in the emphasis on the subject matter gradually gave way to painterly and abstract norms.

In his new phase comparatively simple figures are seen and the background is of one colour with varied tones. Paintings of that period are 'Neel Kumari'.

In the above style, where one colour with variation is used in a composition broken only by lines.

The thick rough lines describe an assemblage of forms as in a myth. Characteristic paintings are 'Holi
in Jaipur', 'Odissi'.

In his middle phase sometimes the space is divided into coloured, areas on which figures are shown. Sometimes the figure is broken into coloured divisions and the tone of this division varies. His 'Raagmala' painting is both lyrical and serene.

After his return from Europe, his figures suddenly became anonymous. They exist on the picture plane but without any specific identify.

'Raagmala' and 'Nritya' series of Husain is based on his visit to Rajasthan, Banaras, Kashmir, Mysore. There are many paintings of horses, women, priests and self portraits. And lastly in his recent work one can notice contrasts of areas of impast with thin dripping colour.

Husains paintings show a keen sense of design. This he inherited from his early involvement in calligraphy. 'In his view calligraphy is the essence of design.'
On the verge of a new chapter in his paintings. Husain is acquiring a control over different medium from brush to pen and pen to charcoal or nail and now paper cuts.
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