CHAPTER-IV

ANALYTICAL STUDY OF AN EMINENT TANTRIC ARTISTS OF INDIA
For a large number of Modern Indian Artists the quest of spirituality is not an unusual pursuit. There has been an ongoing strand of spiritualism in Indian art. The Indian artists are also concerned with faithful representations of icons, rituals and religious practices. But for the most part, one notices a serious dialogue between the manifest and the symbolic means of mysticism. The artist’s search for image and expression transforms itself into a sublime level of consciousness. We can see a range of abstract image. The pictorial expression of the innate harmony to be discovered in the cosmic order. The spiritual experience has thus been a driving force in Indian creativity in its myriad representations.

When we shatter all forms and get behind veil, *Maya* as the Tantra says, that we find reality and become free. When we close our eyes we can really look at things, we see without seeing, to be exact. In the ultimate act of vision the body meditates as well as the mind. The unknown is within, in every atom our being. The Tantric artist works in this spirit. One of the paths opened up by cubism led to a realm of pure geometry. Straight lines; right angles; triangles; circles; smooth, impersonal surfaces; exquisitely platted dispositions of shapes and spaces between them, such are some of the characteristics of the shining and spiritual territory of the Tantric Artists.¹

The present interest among contemporary Indian Painters in Tantric, symbolical and similar metaphysical elements in the art of the past is therefore essentially or even wholly inspired by the visual and pictorial qualities of these old forms of art as well as their ‘novelty’ in the present situation where the world of modern art of the west is fast loosing its hold on the imagination of the advent - graded spirits of India. Tantric symbols and diagrams as well as the yantras with their great geometric stability of suggestions of dynamic movement, strange and meaningful colours have fired the imagination of quite a few Indian painters of today with their potentialities for the creation of a new world of art which can be different from that of the west.²

Some of the eminent Tantric painters of India are: G.R. Santosh, Biren De, K.C.S. Paniker, Prabhakar Barve, Om Prakash, J. Swaminathan, Prafulla Mohanti, P.T. Reddy.

Neo-Tantra, a form “aesthetic and visual exercise” or “non-figurative abstract” but not based on scriptures. The Neo-Tantric Art Movement got its initial impetus in 1965 with an exhibition of paintings by Biren De which appeared to take off on Tantra Art, other artist soon followed, including G.R. Santosh, K.C.S. Paniker, J. Swaminathan, Om Prakash. For these artists, the religious art form seemed likely to develop their form of abstract painting with a genuinely Indian art ideom.³

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Plate- 18

SANTOSH, G.R.
Untitled Acrylic
130 x 151 Oil, 1972
Private, New Delhi
“My concept is broadly thus:

Sex is elevated to the level of Transcendental experience.

I take the human form in its dual male female aspects, in sexual union, in a state of unalloyed fulfillment, caught in a trance, I try to capture this intensity, order and what is regarded as a Yogic discipline”

S.R. Santosh
‘Image and Inspiration’
Studio interview with S.A. Krishnan, LKC-12-13.
(Apr-Sept., 1971)
GULAM RASOOL SANTOSH:

G.R. Santosh – born in 1929 in Srinagar, city of Kashmir in a lower middle class Shia Muslim family. His early years were full of struggle. Being the eldest son, he had to work variously as a signboard painter, a papier-mache worker and a weaver to make a living and support his family. Early on, he learnt to paint landscape. In 1952, he became a member of the Progressive Artists Association. Santosh built his personal world as well as his world of art around Kashmir Shaivate philosophy, commonly referred to as Tantra philosophy. Indian tradition is based on the universal concept of the ultimate reality manifesting itself in a myriad shapes and forms in time and space. His own self is preoccupied with the same universal concept.

Almost every year, beginning from 1953, Santosh has been holding sole exhibitions of his paintings. Not only in Srinagar, Bombay and Delhi, but in New York, Kabul, Chicago, Los Angeles. He is a must of course, at exhibitions of Tantra Art, like the one at Montreal in 1971 or of Neo-Tantra in 1984.

Santosh would often recall that in the year 1964, during a visit to the holy Amarnath Cave in South Kashmir, he was deeply touched by something. This was perhaps a touch of divine grace. After an ‘artistic silence’ for a time, he started painting in what came to be later known as the Neo-Tantric form or school. He can, infact, be considered to be among the founders of this school.
Plate- 16

SANTOSH, G.R.
Untitled
35.5 x 27.5, Water Colour, 1971
Private, New Delhi
He continued to paint in this style till his death on March 10, 1997. This style of painting at once defines and describes this artistic person. His paintings are based on the male and female concept of Shiva and Shakti and therefore, construed as Tantra. According to him sex is elevated to the level of transcendental experience. He took the human form in its dual male and female aspects, in sexual union, in a state of unalloyed fulfillment, caught in a trance. He tried to capture this intensity, order or what is regarded as a yogic – discipline. The work of Santosh where neither totally abstract nor representational. They were imbued with specific symbolic connotations and fused with the mysterious juxtaposition of celestial geometric forms and complex mystical colours inspired by a personal symbolic vision. The artist’s conception of the merging of opposites, which has roots in conscious or unconscious sexual desires and experiences, emphasizes that the male and female pair, Shiva and Shakti, act as complements rather than contradictions. These eventually lead to the eternal concept of cosmic merging and transcendence.

Santosh has also been closely link with Tantric traditions, but the geometrical configurations in his paintings do not serve any special magical functions that were normally assigned to yantras in the Tantric system. According to Prof. P.N. Mago, “Santosh present a coherent world in vital images of his

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5 Santosh - a Painter of Kashmir, Krishnan, S.A., Lalit Kala Contemporary, No.4, April, 1966.
Plate- 17

SANTOSH, G.R.

Untitled

37 x 27, Water Colour, 1971

Private, New Delhi
“The mind of an artist is conditioned and activated by continuity of thought, thereby rendering the creative expression self consistent.... Indian tradition is based on the universal concept of ultimate reality manifesting itself in a myriad shapes and forms in time and space. My own self is preoccupied with the same universal concept.... My paintings are based on male-female concept of Shiva-Shakti and, therefore, construed as Tantra .... To me painting is a necessary, normal activity, no more special than any of my other activities”.

G.R. Santosh, 1978
Tanmum Trayeetti Tantra
Rpt in Booklet,
New Delhi, 1989
heightened awareness. The geometrical forms are like graphs of laws and energies that act equally on the sensible and on super sensible levels.”

There is a link of mathematics and geometry for transcending his concept of metaphysical reality. He interweaves triangles and develops schemes by means of symmetry and balance in a highly imaginative manner. There are vertical, horizontal, oblique and circular movements creating a network of lines and forms that determine all static and kinetic sequence. According to Gulan Rasool Santosh, “Tantric philosophy is a very old concept Geometry was about space beyond. The relationship between sound and image mantra and Tantra, pure sound and pure geometry. This is Tantra”.

To me a painting is a necessary, normal activity no more special than any of my activities. It is an integral part of my “being”, my Svabhava, my Karma, each painting is a vibration and connected with experiences which are of a personal and intimate nature.

In his most recent works, however, unlike his earlier paintings which represented the undifferentiated ‘divine’ in a juxtaposition of symbolic geometric configurations, is an aesthetic tribute to the manifest forms of the elements (earth, water, fire, air and the self) in highly decorative idiom. The paintings are conceived as a symmetrical image wherein he portrays his own self as a central notif. The later paintings, though more fluid than his earlier works are meticulously executed in the manner which has been the hallmark of Santosh’s so called ‘Tantric’ themes.
Plate- 19

SANTOSH, G.R.

Untitled

178 x 127 Oil, 1985

NGMA, New Delhi
Santosh’s Neo Tantric Paintings look like stylized portraits of the female form seated in Padmadasana (the lotus position). This is no mere coincidence. There is a definite suggestion of the female torsion the placement of geometric elements within the composition. This stylization is symptomatic of the devotion of Santosh for Shakti, the ‘Devine Mother’.

Santosh was a superb colourist. His competence in handling colour with varying degrees of delicacy or vigour was evident right from his earliest work, regardless of the medium. His attempt at creating the feeling of light was quite visible even in early works. He used the basic colours of Tantra Vidya in his paintings i.e. black, red, white and blue. 6

He received the National Award for painting in 1958, and Sahitya Kala Parishad Artist of the year Award in 1984 and the next year the Kalhana Award given by the Kashmir Education and Science Society. Besides this he received the Padma Shri in 1977. His art has been on view at major expositions. His paintings are in many prestigious collections worldwide. 7

BIREN DE

Biren DE has always known his vocation as an artist. As an adolescent he left the medical college and joined the Art School. He learned the technique of art very rapidly, and becoming a first-rate portrait painter and draught man. As a student of a third year he had already started an independent kind of composition which was in fact the prologue of his later development. He

Plate- 20

DE, BIREN

Untitled

122 x 76.5, Oil, 1990

Collection: The Artist Photo courtesy

New Delhi
“To fully appreciate his work, one will have to know the leading thread of the whole and penetrate into the philosophy on which it is based and grows with the line of Indian tradition. A central point which is to be found in each of Biren De’s canvases and which constitutes its pivot in the invariable centre immovably fixed and serenely poised of the unmanifested around which other forms of the manifested fold and unfold”.

Ajit Mookherji, LKC-32
(April, 1985)
plugged into life in Delhi first as a portrait painter. As a young artist aged 29, his first big commission was to paint a mural at the convocation Hall, Delhi university.⁸

His compositions from 1950 onwards were mainly figurative, human figures in nature, painted not three dimensionally, but suggesting plasticity with flexed lines and strong colours. He drew heavily from his experiences of the life style of the tribal people. At the same time he was irresistibly drawn to people who were walking the path of renunciation and non-attachment, the path of spiritualism. His work at this time recorded assimilation of synthesis of these two desperate experiences, one with the tribal folks and the other with the seekers of truth. From around the end of 1956, the human figures in his compositions started getting disembodied and turning into free shapes and units. In keeping with the maturing of his consciousness, the forms in his paintings were released from their binding lines and they began to float in space vertically horizontally, elliptically. But the most import and development in his paintings at this period was the appearance of streak of light in the distant horizon, symbolizing a journey towards enlightenment. So the original characters the men and the women — became heavy black, brooding shapes.

At the end of 1959, emerged two major signs one curved U like, representing the female principle [prakriti] and the other straight wedge like representing the male principle [purusha]. In short, these were his graphic symbols of yoni

⁸ Appasamy, Jaya, Biren De – a profile, Lalit Kala Contemporary, No. 6, June, 1970.
Plate- 21

DE, BIREN
Genesis, 1978
Olauf Leinwand
121-5 x 182.5 cm
NGMA, New Delhi
and linga. Subsequently, these two lost their ‘separateness’ to form the matrix, the garbha-greha within his psyche, opening up to the light yonder which he had been intuiting and at times perceiving in his trance, like states. This concept of garbha-greha is of great importance to Biren, for he wishes to suggest that there is a definite line of contact between these two ‘lights’. The central point immovably fixed within our being is only a microcosmic manifestation of the universal soul, the supreme principle that governs the cosmos.9

From 1960, onwards his work has sought the unity of these two basic signs by arranging and rearranging them over and over again, and placing them alongside other fundamental shapes like circle, square, cylinder and parabola.

According to Biren De, “my work has been described as Tantric, or Neo-Tantric since 1965. The rituals of Tantric when it is practiced as a “cult”, have no interest for me. What appeals to me is its overall message which is: Studying the true nature of things, and gaining awareness of an individuals place in and relationship with the universe – through self. Knowledge and self – descriptive living as we do in this age of space exploration, the message may have great significance”.

The direction towards his work was moving becomes clearer through a collection of paintings he executed between late 62 early 65. The underlying theme constituted by this group of paintings being the coming together of man

9 Mookherjee, Ajit, Contemporary Art Series – Biren De, Lalit Kala Academy, 1985, New Delhi, p.16.
Plate- 22
DE, BIREN
October, 1991
96.5 x 96.5, Oil, 1991
Private, New Delhi
“Between blue and red .... Red is outside; it is raw, it is everything, basically due to my contradictory experiences with the tribals, the adivasis, and the Sadhus, the ones that have left everything. There is something which is beyond one, beyond all of us, a kind of surrender. Surrender is very important. This does not mean that you became a fatalist. I have been trying to push out, to counteract the rest with the passion, and so red is easy, red vibrates like this, brings you in; I am oscillating between the two. Thus my paintings are for self integration.

Biren De,  
Conversation with Nevilli Tuli, Delhi  
Sep. 9, 1993.
and women the two principles, two energies, that is — consummation of their union resulting in conception and birth of a new life, and their transcendent journey together.

Biren's recent work seeks the unity of the fundamental shapes. They are not new, for it is the ancient circle, and square, the U and the cylinder that are here. But the forms are confronted or fitted art involved in a unique way. The shapes inspite of their essential geometry are somehow human and more satisfying than the 'hard edge' impersonal statements of contemporary western art. The colours continue to shift between raw, luminous and Sombre, they appear beside, around and through each other. The composition of these pictures seems consolidated formulated and presented in a light crystal. No shift in any relationship can be affected without disturbing the whole equilibrium which is precise and permanent on the other hand inspite of the element of finality there is also a quality of imminence. A luminous light seems contained within and is revealed, a strange fascination holds the viewer as if he were in the presence of an icon.\(^\text{10}\)

Biren's essential objective was to discover the true nature of things, of self-realization and identification with nature. Biren's paintings are images of metaphysical introspection, the experience that he endeavored to share with others. He did not use any symbol except, perhaps, the lotus or the bursting seed. He eschewed both documentation and fantasy and tried to give a

Plate - 23
DE, BIREN
You, July 1970
132 x 132, Oil, 1970
Chester and Davida Herwitz, U.S.A.
pointer, towards a more co-coordinated human existence in his efforts to discover.\textsuperscript{11}

**SYED HAIDER RAZA:**

Born in 1922 to a forest warden in Madhya Pradesh in central India, he studied painting at the Nagpur school of art and the Sir J.J. School of Art, Bombay, before leaving for the Ecole Nationale Des Beaux Arts in Paris on French Government Scholarship in 1950. Recipient of the Prix de-la-Critique in 1956, first non-French artist receive the honour. In recognition to his marvelous contributions in the sphere of art, the Indian government gave him the Padma Shri in the year 1981. S.H. Raza is also a fellow of the Lalit Kala Academy at New Delhi in India. Further on the state government of the place of his birth Madhya Pradesh, awarded him the Kalidas Samman.\textsuperscript{12}

He has participated in several individual exhibitions of his paintings and group shows both in India and abroad. In an early renounced the lavish Kashmir landscape for which he was known, in favour of the resonant symbolism that has become his hallmark. Through this symbolism, he translates the organic processes of germination, growth, decay and resurgence into a geometry of the sublime while he has translated the landscape into the deep colour saturations of an abstract pictorial space occasionally annotated with a floating poem. Raza more often evokes the theme of fertility through such key motifs as the bija or seed, the bindu or focal source, which occupy a

\textsuperscript{11} Tantra Like Paintings of Biren De, Roopa-Lekha, Vol. 60, No. 1-2, 1988.
\textsuperscript{12} Malik, Keshav, A Question of Symbols, Lalit Kala Contemporary, No. 12, 1973.
Plate- 24

RAZA, S.H.
Surya
203 x 190, Acrylic, 1986
Private, Paris
“My present work is the result of two parallel enquiries. Firstly, it aimed at pure plastic order. Secondly, it concerns the theme of nature. Both have converged into a single point and become inseparable; the point, the bindu, symbolises the seed, bearing the potential of all life, in a sense’.... To express this concept, the artist (Raza) resorts to the principles which govern pictorial language; the essential vocabulary of the point, line, diagonal, circle, square and triangle ... This concern with pure geometry and its signification can be misconstrued to suggest the approach of a formalist, or a structuralist, or even that of a neo-tantric. Nothing could be more misleading”.

central place in his private mythology. From his earlier landscapes and
cityscape in semi-abstract style, Raza, Paris-based Indian artist, had moved
to reducing everything to the metaphor of spheres, cones & cylinders and
created a world of geometry. Geometry provided him both a plane and a
ground for his luminous colours. In his mandala-like paintings, the bindu
emerged as a ‘complimentarily’ of forces that engender energy. The paintings,
in an outburst of the five basic colours represented his, search for the Sunya.
Rich in meaningful organization of lines and forms in dazzling colours, his
paintings were a ‘visual orchestration’ for the perspective.  

A strong colourist Raza’s painting resonate the passionate hot colours of
India with all their symbolic, emotive value, while drawing from the
memories of childhood spent in the forest he has been inspired by ‘Indian
Metaphysical Thoughts’. Many of his paintings have a dark circular focal
point terms the bindu which according to him is the fountain head of both
energy and creativity. To him, the bindu symbolizes the core of creation, the
center of universe, the nothingness from which everything originates and in
which every thing finds its end. It is the shunya in which every thing rest. So
S.H. Raza explains his fascination with the bindu, which has become the
leitmotif in his work, illustrating his interpretation of creation and divinity, he
is one of the India’s great icons.

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By the 1970's Raza had grown increasingly unhappy and carelessness with his own work and wanted to find a new direction and deeper authenticity in his work, and move away from what he called the 'plastic art'. His trips to India, specially to caves, Ajanta, Ellora, followed by those Banaras, Gujarat and Rajasthan, made him realize his roots and study Indian Culture more closely. the result was 'Bindu', which signified his rebirth as a painter. The Bindu came forth in 1980 and took his work deep and brought his new-found Indian vision and Indian Ethnography.

After the introduction of 'Bindu (a point or the source of energy) he added fewer dimensions to his thematic oeuvre in the following decades with the inclusion of themes around the Tribhuj (Triangle) which bolstered Indian concept of space and tie as well as that of prakriti-purusha' (the female and the male energy).

The unique energy vibrating with colour in his early landscapes are now more subtle but equality if not more dynamic Raza abandoned the expressionistic landscape for a geometric abstraction and the Bindu. Raza perceives the bindu as the center of creation and existence progressing towards forms and colour as well as energy sound, space and time.

His work took another leap in 2000 when he began to express his increasingly deepened insights and thought on Indian spiritual and created works around the Kundalini Nagas and the Mahabharat.
Plate-25

Bindu and Earth (1983)
Acrylic on canvas; 160 x 80 cm

Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Chester E. Herwitz, Worcester, U.S.A.
“My work is my own inner experience and involvement, it is the mysteries of nature and form which is expressed in colour line space and light”

S.H. Raza

The life history of SH Raza’s career saw his paint on themes related to western Modernian and then he slowly shifted from Expressionist towards the abstraction in mode. Presently his work features elements of Tantrism inspired from Indian Scriptural Texts. In other words his paintings showcasing landscapes and townscapes during the 40’s gradually metamorphosed to become expression abstract works.

K.C.S PANIKER

He studied at the Government college of Arts and Crafts Madras and received teaching position there in 1941. In 1944 he established Progressive Artists Association in Madras and Chola Mandel Artists’ Village Madras in 1966.

K.C.S. Paniker moved from the romanticism of the early years and involved with great case to the elements of a new and contemporary metaphysics and started working on the possibilities of two-dimensional design. By intensifying this approach to a painting he had succeeded in eliminating the ‘scientific’ or ‘realistic’ mass almost completely from the picture. Mass

16 Wright S Fredrick, Neo-Tantra, Contemporary Indian Painting, Wright Art Gallery, Los Angeles, 1985.
Plate- 26
Paniker, K.C.S.
Words and Symbols Series
43x124. Oil on board, 1965
Gallery Chemould,
Bombay
“... My work of the Words and Symbols series, started in 1963, using mathematical symbols, Arabic figures and the Roman script, helping me create an atmosphere of new picture making which I seemed very much to need... 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”.

K.C.S. Paniker,
‘Contemporary Painters and Metaphysical elements in the art of the past’, LKC 12-13 (Apr-Sep 1971).
Plate- 27
K.C.S. PANIKER
Picture in gold, 1969
122.5 x 211 cm
National Gallery of Modern Art,
New Delhi
according to this interpretation which he gives in his ‘words and symbols’ series is an intensity of arrangement an intricate and minutely ‘live’ quality in design and not the quantitative substance of European science. The totality in Paniker’s design on his own private admission had been suggested by the horoscope. Now the horoscope, not matter its ‘Scientific’ rationality, represents in an instantaneous design of script and line a case of human existence. It is a device that converts the chronological sequence of events that make a life into a single pictorial instant. Visualizing this way Paniker interprets time as the total design of an existence and not as the abstract chronological quantity of western science. These two reformulations of two of the basic concepts of ‘scientific rationality’ is clear progress towards the metaphysics of a new rationality. During his lifetime K.C.S. Paniker did not make any personal statement regarding the relationship of his paintings with Tantric visual and spiritual manifestations.\textsuperscript{17}

A cursory glance at his latest paintings unmistakably established his kinship with Tantric plastic forms and spiritual doctrines. The application of vermilion hues on gold and silver foils at once reminds one of certain Tantric manifestations of god, goddesses and village deities. The visual imagery incorporating abstract symbols such as square, circle, triangles and traditional images of lotus, transformations and variations of different forms of deities, and improvisation of other iconographic elements, such as tridents, at once

\textsuperscript{17} Parimo, Ratan, Thoughts on Concretizing the Abstraction, Kala Dirgha, Vol. 1, Issue 2, April 2001.
Plate- 28

K.C.S. PANIKER
Words and symbols, 1965
121.3 x 151 cm
National Gallery of Modern Art,
New Delhi
demonstrates the artist’s creative vision, closely related to that imbibed in the Tantric visual vocabulary. The total expression evolves from the artist’s mystic experiences, emerging out of his inner consciousness.

He said – “Mine own work of the ‘Words and Symbols series, started in 1963, using mathematical symbols. Arabic figures and the Roman script, helped me to create an atmosphere of new picture making which I seemed to need very much.”

To him the modern art of the west had a vital source of inspiration. His work has little to do with Tantric art, though he was visually aware somewhat of its forms. His pictures are just a contemporary expression.18

PRAPHAKAR BARVE:

Prabhakar Barve was born in Konkan into a family closely associated with the arts. His grand uncle V.P. Karmakar was a well-known sculptor and his father was an artist working in Bombay’s Film Studio. Barve joined the J..J. School of Arts and was heavily influenced by Paul Klee during his early years. During his student years he was involved, along with other leading painters like K.G. Subramanyam, Gautam Waghela, and Ambadas in the “Weaver’s Service Centre” where five artists work closely with weaver’s in the development of modern textile designs.19 Soon after, he spent three years in Varanasi, his acquaintance with the cult of Tantrics is obvious in many of his

Plate-29
BARVE, PRABHAKAR
Chest Series: The Trunk with a Rainbow. 30x47.5 W/c & Ink. 1933
Private, Bombay

Plate-30
BARVE, PRABHAKAR
Chest Series: The Red Box. 30x47.5 W/c & Ink. 1933
Private, Bombay
paintings during this time. His involvement with Tantra imagery is of a different range. He sustains his compositions within an architecture of symbolism, an iconic fantasy as it were, derived from what may be described as a curious mixture of op, pop, Indian folk paintings and Tantra.

Barve reacts optically to the almost coercing visuals of city life and the appurtenances of urban living. There is a certain flatness and garnishness in his screaming colours. Entirely different in effect. Since Barve mostly uses the housepainter's brand of synthetic glossy enamels, he relates himself with a pertinent to the loudness and tenor of city existence – the gallimaufry of post-box-red, taxi car-cream and black, traffic sign-red-yellow, green and the like.  

His colours were deliberately restricted in range and he applied them in bold flat areas. During this face Barve started employing playing cards to great effect [e.g. Astral Movements]. He borrowed and adapted the standard imagery of Tantra. His geometrical explorations were simple but inventive, the elliptical form suggesting an open seed, the twin triangle, and the little spherical, nuclear entities floating in space.

Barve delights in the exploration of lines and linear forms; in the strength of basic design. The nature of a diagrammatic scheme in his paintings illuminates the constant play of symbols and colours of an urban environment with recurring primitivism stains that essentially characterizes the tenor of

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modern art. Starting from 1961, until his death in 1995 held held 12 solo exhibitions and in 1969 he won an award instituted by the Japanese newspaper Yoshi hari Shimbun. In 1976 he won one of the top awards in the Annual Exhibition of the Lalit Kala Academy. Towards the end of his life he wrote a book in Marathi “Kora Canvas”.

OM PRAKASH SHARMA

Born on 14th December 1932, at Bawal, Haryana, India, in a conservative and poor family of railway employees who had no interest in Art. He continued to live and mostly work in India which allowed him the freedom to do what he wanted to as an artist. That also inspired him to constantly derive from her enormous wealth of visual ideas and magnificent artistic traditions. The journey continues thus. In 1950, he did 150 paintings and many drawings and sketches. Out of which he gave 20 water colours executed in wash technique, typical of Bengal school, to someone for exhibition, in Delhi. He gave another 20 British school style landscapes, painted in water colours on locations in Delhi to his teacher. Out of remaining 110 works were sold.

He found that in 1950’s only a few would appreciate and fewer to buy art. In 1953, 56 and 58, he traveled extensively in India east, west and south, to study the magnificence of Indian Art through the ages in temples and caves and make hundreds of sketches, which completed the cycle of understanding the intricacies of Indian classical Art. He started playing Sitar in January of

On Om Prakash Sharma’s exhibition of recent works based on Tantra, for instant, at artist “Tantra originated from the union of Shiva and Shakti, an intense practice of ritual and customs. While I don’t practice that, as an artist it still remains a socially relevant form of self expression. It delves into the source and the core of existence”, says the artist who works with the mandala (geometric pattern), pure colours and cosmic geometry. As artist like Om Prakash using Tantric symbols in their work here was a form that merged both the abstract and the figurative, “I started using geometric symbols and instruments, combining architectural concepts for my artistic idiom”.

The art of Tantra,
Namita Kohli,
Hindustan Times,
1956, and got passionately interested in the theory and practice of North Indian Classical Music. He came in contact with eminent gurus including Pandit Ravi Shankar, who helped him in identifying the traditional iconography of different ranges which inspired him to paint 25 Raghmala paintings in water colours.

He went to Kashmir in 1960 and again in 1969 for an artist camp, and in 1962 to Dalhousie which brought him closer to the beauty of nature in the gigantic Himalayas. He painted it in water colours and made many sketches there which were used to make several paintings.

In January of 1961, he joined the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi to teach more Art and Basic Design. In 1964, he went to U.S.A. after a successful exhibition of Kumar Gallery, New Delhi, a prominent and active place to show contemporary art in the sixties. Besides studying at Columbia university and Art student’s League for post-graduate studies in Fine Arts and Art history, he held three sole exhibitions. He took a course in Chinese calligraphy and also learnt graphics under a Japanese master to do Lithography. He painted 34 canvases in to and acrylics in New York, which were exhibited in three solo exhibitions, and also made many drawings in dry medium from live models. Out of them 36 were exhibited after thirty years in 1995 at Aurobindo Gallery, New Delhi.23

In 1967, Ajit Mookerjee’s book Tanta Art was published by Kumar Gallery. It created worldwide ripples and a few of Indian artists including Om Prakash, were labeled as ‘Tantric Artists: while it vindicated his use of geometrical forms it also groomed him in his formative years. It bothered him to the extent that he said in an interview.

“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-realization and the Magnificent concept of discipline in everything and on the highest plane which could influence and inspire me.”

In December 1980, he had kind of a retrospective exhibition of whatever painting he had with him at the large galleries of Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi shared with Late G.R. Santosh, who was a friend and compatriot.

Tantra, at best is concerned with those energies which are bestowed by nature. One has to recognize and identify them with himself and during the process of one’s work. In Om Prakash’s case, constant work, meditating on them, and continuous effort of recognizing the phenomenon of energy has helped his Neo-Tantric Paintings of the past 17 years. His paintings start at the point where Tantric illustrations or designs finish. In the real Tantric way the

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Plate- 32
OM PRAKASH
Union of Symbols
60x80, 2006
Acrylic on Canvas
Courtesy Artist
outward simplicity of Om Prakash works hold behind them tremendous turmoil, struggle pain, pleasure, emotion and detachment.

It is paintings are a reflection of himself. Tantra art has depended heavily on geometry and so his paintings. Complex colour orchestration is an essential component of his work without which the emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels could not be reached. His colour are mystical and do not express son the physical level. Like in tantra his search becomes research along the most demanding logical progressions gradually incorporating the forms, symmetry, directions and symbols.

The Tantric philosophy embraces a very wholesome view of nature. Tanoti iti tantra – meaning whatever holds the cosmic egg together – Upanishada. In his alter works he had tried to gain rater insight into nature by viewing from without and from within. To express cosmology Tantric artists have used symbols and so had lie by letting them emerge originally through the forms. If he had used elements from plant life or landscape it is not from sticky sentimentality or for decoration but for the purpose of establishing a more concrete symbolic synthesis. Om Prakash’s search for sound/music image has emerged from his dual involvement in painting and playing sitar. The typical nuances of his tones are the result of this experience with Indian classical Music. The arithmetic of his paintings is more musical than anything else. He had constantly tried to see his music and hear his paintings.  

25 Fredrick, S. Wright, Neo-Tantra: Contemporary Indian Paintings Inspired by Tradition, Wright Art Gallery, Los Angeles, 1985, p. 201.
Plate- 33

OM PRAKASH
Mandala of Red Flower
40x40, 2005
Acrylic on Canvas
Courtesy Artist
Years ago, his western friend Prof. Ellena Sendy UK used to call him ‘Om Pracasso’ or ‘Omadeus’ considering him to be one like them. It was a tease as much as to recognize his talent. At the same time he belongs to India, which he is widely recognized and granted prestigious awards. His art is avant garde and yet traditional, bold and gentle, both instinctive and rationally organized. His paintings shining from inside with enormous energy are intricately detailed with mysterious abstraction and geometrically clear. He is the one who can happily combine all the extremes due to his amazing ability to feel and create new kinds of harmony.26

In 1969, Om Prakash won National Award for Painting by Lalit Ka⁠la Academy, New Delhi, by the President of India and several awards in State Exhibitions including First Prizes in Annual Art Exhibitions of the A.I.F.A.C.S., New Delhi (1966, 1967, 1969), Delhi State Award in 2003. And he is a recipient of an Honorary membership of Russian Academy of Fine Art, Moscow.27

An Analysis of the Art of Tantric Paintings reveals many interesting aspects: In the present day, artistic and cultural situation reveals a general desire to make an intense return to a state of primitive orientation. In the conscience of civilized man enquiries resound to re-gain the lost flavour of cultural primitivism.

26. Letter from Prof. Elen Sandyuk, Moscow State University, 4th July, 2006.
27. Shukla, Rajesh, Kumar, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Winson Books, India, 2008, p. 76.
Plate 34

OM PRAKASH
Barren Amptitude
44x56, 2005
Acrylic on Canvas
Courtesy Artist
The Indian painter may perhaps be able to renew himself and preserve, incidentally, the spoor of national identity, by his relationship with developments arising out of a source closer and immediate to his environmental and contemplative consciousness. The retinal exploitation of the patterns of the various forms and motifs of the tantra style, may prove more satisfactory at achieving a norm of aesthetic efficacy sustained by the ethos of one's own culture.

Some of India's significant painters have been influenced by the symbolic iconography of Tantra Art; they have derived assurance and sustenance from its methods of 'metaphorical and pictorial thinking.'

G.R. Santosh is the one of the most important artist, in whose work, there is a lot of reference to the Tantric ideology. His work is a most graphic and impeccable realization of the Tantric ideal of non asceticism. He depicts the union of Shiva and Shakti in an exoteric manner regarding sex as the supreme symbol of the senses.

Biren De, is commonly described as a Tantric Painter, although he does not consider himself as a cult painter. His essential objective is to discover the true nature. His paintings possesses a visionary quality in terms of transcendental concept of light, of an effulgent, expansive kind. The forms are based on the principles of radiation, multi-petalled flower-like forms in their myriad manifestations. They are the images of energy that activates life, rendered in brilliant, glowing colours.
S.H. Raza's work began with a point (a bindu – the source of energy) and fanned out into triangles (tribhuj) in vibrant shades. There was a point (bindu) below, signifying the female energy source and a point at the top symbolizing the male entity.

In Paniker's work we find what seems to merely script graph appearing like a manuscript page enlarged to the size of a canvas.

The geometrical configurations, in the works of the above mentioned artists are closely linked with the Tantric traditions, they do not serve any specific magical functions that were normally assigned by Yantras in the Tantric systems. The forms of their art are the images of their consciousness and their aspirations. They reveal an urge to connect individual consciousness to the deepest layers of being.