CHAPTER FIVE
THE BUILDERS OF PRINTMAKING IN BARODA

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Survey and Brief Background

In the early years of this century, we see a slight change in the artistic tastes of the Indian art appreciators, but the main thrust of the art schools in India remained Western or Victorian. It had no living contacts with Indian background, the tradition or the people. It was a sterile art; India needed a different kind of art environment. Abindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Ramkinkar Baij and Benode Behari Mukherjee, made attempts in this direction and an art institution called Kala Bhavan was established in Santiniketan since around 1920. But this institution developed severe limitations and did not fulfill the needs of the world of art.

The great vacuum in art education was filled up when the Fine Arts Faculty of M.S. University was established in 1950, offering professional courses of very high standard and at the same time creating the right environment for creative work; it was also viable in every way. This faculty has created a major impact on the art world and it draws inspiration from both British and American traditions. Baroda and Santiniketan have been major centres of art for many years. Santiniketan was the art capital of India for at least two decades till Baroda, came into being in 1950.

In planning the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, Markand Bhatt had taken care to study the working of similar institutions in the other parts of the world and consult some of the well known artists and art educationists of the country. The institution has, since, grown in size, range and diversity. Under Prof. Bhatt and the succeeding Deans, N.S. Bendre, N.N.
Chaudhuri, K.G. Subramanyan and N.B. Joglekar, after whom Ratan Parimoo had taken over as Dean, the courses have increased in number and variety besides gaining clarity and objectivity. All members of the teaching faculty have contributed, in their individual ways, in its shaping and growth and continue to evaluate its effectiveness and plan for its future development, involving external specialists in each field in the yearly meetings of its Board of Studies and Faculty. However, one can see that through the first twenty-five years 1950-75, this institution has had the satisfaction of having produced a number of artists, designers and scholars of standing and originality, who can be counted as being in the forefront of the modern Indian art movement.

Baroda became famous with the establishment of Fine Art Faculty under the direction of a succession of liberal professors who believed in letting the student be creative right from the word go, by stimulating his spirit of inquiry and experimentation. We can see that the general objective of the institution was to build a cooperative environment, in which both teachers and students would be creative and interact with each other in a constructive way. “One would admit that this is more the ideal than reality; but to have it as the ideal in itself makes a great difference as it defreezes the academic atmosphere and brings in a certain sense of ease and informality, which the visitors to the institution often notice. We believe that the function of Art is not purely entertainment or edification of the few; it is, today, a very powerful vehicle of communication to the many and it is the depth and refinement of this communication that will control the general cultural level of society.”

The teachers under whose guidance the Fine Art Faculty, Baroda, took its shape were Bendre, Subramanyan and Sankho Chaudhuri. The latter two had been trained in Santiniketan and were among the most forward looking artists to come out of this nationalistic institution. Through her doctoral thesis, Nalini Bhagwat points out: “They brought with them different experiences, but were equally involved with the ideas of coming to terms with new art movements from the West. Those, by their lively teaching, inspired generations of art students, who afterwards attained significant place amongst the leading artists of India. The teaching of those masters not only moulded the minds of the young art students, but even proved advantageous to the growth of their own creative work.”

The teachers of the faculty acquired a progressive attitude and created a new atmosphere of freedom for both the art student and the artist. The new situation gave the
artist a higher status on one hand, and loaded him with new responsibilities, on the other. "As a creative person with a right to an individual voice and language, he has to cultivate these within the multitude of cultural facts that surround him, taking the grain and leaving out the chaff, and for this, he needs circumspection and critical discernment. Besides, the new situation has brought to the artist a larger choice of professional fields and techniques. To cope up with these, he needs all the skills, intelligence and information he can muster and a broader sense of perspective. His search has to be for an art language that he can use and enlarge, not specific styles and manners, but for also preparing himself for this, he needs a multi-disciplinary exposure."³

Printmaking activity in Baroda was a secondary subject with N.S. Bendre and K.G. Subramanyan at the helm. With the technical expertise of N.B. Joglekar and the aesthetic guidance of teachers a curriculum was started. The department was on the lines of Western printmaking departments; an atmosphere of experimentation and challenges was created. Both Bendre and Subramanyan had already done some printmaking. Bendre had learnt printmaking in 1947, when he had gone to America and had done some etchings in the academic style.¹ Subramanyan had his training in Santiniketan and was always ready to explore. Together they created an atmosphere, where printmaking became a new field to be explored and was of a major interest to anybody who wanted to experiment in the field. The challenge of the medium, the technical possibilities and workshop atmosphere all together was an encouragement for the students to try the medium. Work was not done in regular time, but during extra time and interested students were also encouraged. Initially, woodcut and linocut were done. Lithography started a few years after 1950, when a press was set up. Other facilities were gradually obtained within about ten years.

When searching the faculty’s records, we find that the core objective of this faculty is to help an art student to the extent it can; it tries to expose him to a large spectrum of facts, techniques, and concepts and help him to make an individual choice. It keeps its programmes broad and resilient. It expects a considerable variety in the work attitudes of its students and does not look forward to manneristic conformities. What it looks forward to is a sense of purpose and sense of environment. Meanwhile, N.B. Joglekar, the master of lithography techniques keenly guided the artists to produce advanced results in litho prints. Hasmukh Patel was the expert in woodcut and linocut techniques. In the graphic department, we can
see the interaction between the teachers and students working together for the occasion of the annual art fair, or a group exhibition for the benefit of the Faculty's projects or development. This situation helped the students to overcome technical problems at the experimental level. A group of printmakers working together on a large number of editions always make things easier. To cultivate such an atmosphere, the department has been setting up workshops where national and sometimes international printmakers come and work. The very first of such workshops was set up with the participation of Somnath Hore around mid-60s. However, during this workshop, Somnath benefited from the expert lithographic know-how of N.B. Joglekar, while advanced methods of Somnath inspired many of the participants.

About N.B. Joglekar's significant role in Baroda's printmaking, Nilima Sheikh has observed; "N.B. Joglekar was a painter and a printmaker, who had studied graphic reproduction techniques in London. A gentle, technically competent teacher with a special interest in lithography, he set up and developed the printmaking section at the Faculty with quiet diligence since the early 50s. From 1962 onwards, many students and teachers made forays into printmaking and publication in connection with the fair. Joglekar remained in the background assisting and resolving technical problems modestly and effectively."4

Baroda is a city, which almost had no artists' community of its own before Independence. However, it became a centre of art activity with the inception of a new Faculty of Fine Arts. I would like here to refer to Prof. Ratan Parimoo, who has been involved with this institution during the last 45 years of its existence, first as a student of painting around the mid-50s, and afterwards, as a head of the Department of Art History and Aesthetics; "Baroda is not a provincial centre of the region, but has a larger pan-Indian significance, the samething that Santiniketan had assumed during the decades before Independence. Baroda has refuted the notion that the art school experience only stifles creativity and somehow has to be endured by a young artist, only to be forgotten gradually as a bad nightmare. But the Fine Arts Faculty premises and what I call the 'mitti' within its boundary walls, has worked on the psyche and the minds of the artists and acted as a major motivational force. The Baroda school is collectively what all its active participants have made it at any given time."5

Through the years, the Faculty annual fair became a good way of extending the function of art to illuminate the society and more personally, evolve a better way of living,
and guide the students in their search for a vocation or profession. It could well be a career in textile or graphic design, in setting up silkscreen units for commercial use, in teaching art in schools or for psychiatric therapy. It could be a career in puppetry, animation or filmmaking.

Going further, we see another batch of illustrious teachers coming on the scene in the early sixties. While Mahendra Pandya, Jeram Patel, thereafter Ratan Parimoo came to teach art history, Jyoti Bhatt, Gulam Sheikh, V.R.Patel, V.S.Patel and some other significant artists joined the different departments. Such outstanding and talented teachers were behind these advanced methods of teaching, which enabled the students to discover themselves. Unlike Santiniketan, which symbolizes all that is best in oriental art, Baroda looks both homeward and Westward. The workers of the Baroda group stand out on the strength of the sheer quality of vision that unfolds and the technique that sustains it. There is sophistication in the use of colour and form and the delineation of detail is sharply accented.

The second half of the 60s to the early 70s, had been a period of accelerated growth in the field of printmaking production for different needs. Shivaji K. Panikkar states on these group activities; "The involvement of the senior painter and teacher K.G. Subramanyan" in these activities had been a guiding inspiration for his younger colleagues like Jyoti Bhatt, Vinodray Patel and V.S. Patel. Further, the technical experience brought back home after studying abroad; particularly some of the mediums like colour intaglio printing by Jyoti Bhatt in 1967. V.S. Patel’s interest in developing a commercial medium like silkscreen printing as a serious technique for the creation of "art per se" is shared also by artists like Jyoti Bhatt, Vinodray Patel and P.Dhumal. They all experimented with this medium using the trial-and-error method during 1970s with great success. Particularly V.S. Patel and Jyoti Bhatt had been the initiators of photo-transfer technique in the processing of silkscreen and offset printing."

At this juncture, I think it should be worthwhile to make mention of a few other talented printmakers, who came to Baroda as students and benefited very much from the wonderful facilities and the high standard of Baroda’s teachers and artists, as well as expert knowledge of printmaking know-how. Such outstanding students were Shanti Dave, Haroon M. Khimani, Gauri Shankar, Laxma Goud, Devraj, D.L.N.Reddy, Madhu, Anjana Mehra, Prayag Jha, Chanda Joglekar and later on Nirmalendu Das, Dattatraya Apte and Suranjan Basu, to name a few. These printmakers later popularized printmaking elsewhere in
India too. It takes lot of space to enumerate their achievement in this field, but at least we should be aware about the significant role they played in contemporary Indian printmaking. Of them, Laxma Goud is an exceptionally talented printmaker. Though he did not go abroad to grasp any further printmaking know-how and even did not do a specialized study of printmaking, Laxma achieved an outstanding quality of amazing etchings, aquatint and viscosity. In brief, he is considered now as an exceptional etcher. His lively, irrepressible personality and exceptionally skilled pair of hands made him a presence to reckon with. And it was Laxma, who brought the quest for the authentic image right into the centre of the business of printmaking. We will bring him into the focus as soon as possible.

The printmakers of Baroda have made efforts to create a better appreciation of art at a local level. They succeeded to create a certain amount of interest in printmaking. Some local schools have employed ex-students of the Faculty at whose initiative they have introduced printmaking in their teaching programmes and even acquired hand presses for children to make linoprints. K.G. Subramanyan once said, “One often comes across lively linocuts by children in the brochures and souvenirs in the annual programmes of these schools instead of photographs of functions and local celebrities.” The Graphic Arts Department at Baroda in the past three decades has made considerable progress in varied ways, particularly in terms of the technical facilities and in the overall artistic quality. The floating population of the student community, hailing from various parts of the country, while keeping alive the art scene here, are the carriers of artistic ideas and technical mastery and informations to the different regional centres, thus, contributing to the growth of the medium in a national level.

Shivaji K. Panikkar points out; “The Graphic Art Department at Baroda, in the initial decade had been growing slowly, though steadily, working within the limitations of basic technical requirements. Prints in black and white were done within the range of limited mediums. However, a number of factors contributed to this, among which may be pointed out that the annual fine arts fair gave scope to the artists in the creation of original print in the form of portfolios, calendars, greeting cards and designing of children’s books, all of which used to be printed in silkscreen process, linoblocks and litho offsets, which were executed as group undertakings.”

The world view of the generation of young artists that grew up at Baroda during the later sixties and through the seventies was substantially enlightened by these encounters with
Subramanyan’s erudition. In fact, it was not just through studio instruction that young artists learnt from him. His lectures opened up the breadth and range of artistic activity, straddling time and geography, of locating function within specific cultural terms. Jeram Patel has also a significant role in the field of art education. But, we should notice that his personality stood out in contrast to that of Subramanyan. Despite the fact that the administrative positions occupied were similar to that of Subramanyan, “The example of creative energy he presented through his innovations, left a lasting impression on a generation of artists and designers wherever he worked. The visual qualities of Jeram’s works have taken numerous incarnations in the works of the younger generation of Baroda artists. His creature-like forms became stunted trees or lizards and grotesque animals in Laxma Goud’s work or a penis in P.D. Dhumal’s etchings.”

It is very obvious that some younger artists, who happened to be studying under Bhatt or Subramanyan got deep inspiration from their instructors and they were fascinated particularly by Jeram’s concepts and image-making, especially by his attitude towards sexual imagery and the style of his drawing, the remarkable one of these artists is Laxma Goud, and may be P.D. Dhumal, who got some strong influences from the creative vision depictions of Jeram, but I am very sure of the exchanging of the ideas and experiences that took place between the two veterans Jeram and Bhatt and may be to some extent with Subramanyan. In fact, sexual imagery acquired a strong impact on the products of Baroda. These days some of the artists approached this attitude as a new fashion. It is not deeply rooted in their conscience, such younger artists are only a few and not very effective. However, they were seekers of excitement, like others everywhere. On the other hand, the revolutionary group, viz., ‘Group 1890,’ which was formed in 1962 and aimed to fulfill the quest for an Indianness of ephemeral quality of Indian artists and argued that the preordained, natural supremacy assumed by the Western cultures needed a thorough revision, with attention to the reciprocal influences and interpenetration of the world cultures. In this effort, the group was consisting of J. Swaminathan, Jeram Patel, Jyoti Bhatt, G.M. Sheikh, Himmat Shah and others. Bhatt had gravitated to the thinking of the Group after the frustrating, “search for significance between tradition and contemporary trends.” Unfortunately, this Group did not last long, so after a few years it had faded, and slowly and slowly come to be just a part of the history of Fine Arts’ documentation. Revolutionary ideas were the fashion of that epoch.
of the early sixties and thereafter, the revolutionary ideas evolving in Baroda's art scene, due to special activities organized by the distinguished students, who came to the department of graphic at Baroda, and the new attitude of grouping the efforts of some leading artists as we mentioned above, about the 'Group 1890'. In fact, it is strong to hear somebody rising such slogan as; "I don't want to create anything... I never claim that I am creating anything. And if I do happen to say that I am creating something, it is nonsense. Nobody can create anything. The only thing that one can do is to destroy things." And why destruction? "To forget something... but what that thing is I don't know and I am confused about it." Jeram Patel, 1964.

However, Jeram has an advanced concept of the role of Fine Arts. To my mind, such slogans are very good on paper or they may be even suitable for protesting or arousing curiosity, such as why those people are protesting loudly? If they truly care about their works, then let their works convey the message of their thoughts. However, Jeram has some how, an adequate technical experience and some theoretical knowledge in printmaking processes: "A printmaker uses his tools for defining unknown myths existing since time immemorial, or gathered from social roots, reality outside the realm of mundane experiences, or images visualized by an inner eye, where the retina is absent and is not needed or a thinking language is employed. It is nowhere near his inner conflicts and yet space is created by visual awareness around us. The formal structure is organized by continuous experiences in an urban landscape and yet a mystical atmosphere is created."

By stating such ideas of Baroda's printmakers, we may create a 'form' for the art scene of these days and also for the atmosphere around each artist involving in art-making, especially in the graphic department. In this regard, let us go after some other view points, which concern one of the paradoxes that constitutes human existence and embodied in the works of Jeram, which is the experience of sensuality and its denial, or the other way round. For him, the printed images can be realized by means of varied approaches and also by utilizing in different techniques of printmaking and yet the all-pervading mind of the human species wants to trek himself towards an impossible end. However, there is one chance concerning the power of the human mind, which enables it to create or discover new images. By this time, we see several of Baroda's artists getting involved with intaglio printing in the late sixties and through the seventies. Jeram Patel, Bhupen Khakhar, G.M. Sheikh, Vinod
Shah and others - all explored the medium in their own ways. Later, Naina Dalal and Jayant Parikh set up small presses in their homes. Besides Jyoti Bhatt, there were also younger artists, who developed the range of the medium to serve as their chief expressive mode. In the following pages, we will explain more about this medium.

Knowing about the forerunners of printmaking at Baroda is very essential to create some kind of proper interpretation and also to build up a powerful image of those glorious days of the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies. Though we have already stated the significant role of Subramanyan, we still have this to say; Subramanyan has acquired a legendary status in Indian art world with his writings, years of teaching affecting some of the most prominent of the new generation of artists and being deeply involved in the preservation of folk art and craft in the technological era. In fact, the Faculty of Fine Arts was always open for all the progressive ideas. This fact came to be more visible when some powerful eminent artist came to stay for sometime in Baroda or even to be a resident of this prolific and dynamic city - we already stated few of these names, however, we have some further point of views. Though J. Swaminathan was a Delhi-based artist, he influenced Baroda’s art scene by his revolutionary slogans and also by his original sources of art and thinking. His advanced view points deeply inspired some of Baroda’s prominent artists. They come together with J. Swaminathan in ‘Group 1890.’ He strove to reconstruct the folk art and in particular, the Kangra miniature’s stylistic features to produce a mytho-poetic art with shimmering epiphany of colours. His paintings tend to draw the viewer into an introspective space where the metaphysical vision of nature abounds: birds, mountains, trees transport one into serendipity. As opposed to Western art’s retinal approach, he comprehended Indian painting’s spiritual basis of creating a silent, soporific effect.

While painting and sculpture pose problems of being damaged in transit, because of their size, weight and uniqueness, prints, due to their easy portability, greater availability and moderate price, may serve as a happy solution to break the vicious circle of the centralization of art activity. Printmakers at Baroda are not an exception to the situation. However, they have made efforts to create a better appreciation of art at a local level. It was after the mid-60s, when etching had replaced woodcut and lithography as the prime graphic medium at Baroda. “In fact, graphic medium required excessive technical virtuosity. Intaglio printing in particular is a marvelously versatile medium, yielding to the most delicate touch, to an
inexhaustible amount of teasing. It can give the deepest of velvety depths, the subtlest tones or the most delicate linearity, in colour or monochrome. Baroda has had its share of intaglio printmakers, who have exploited this range.\textsuperscript{10}

It was in 1969, when printmaking at Baroda Graphic Department developed into a full-fledged department offering a post-graduate degree, in which degree-holders of painting were admitted. Diploma holders of painting were offered post-diploma courses. Specialization courses were offered for the first time in each of the graphic technical processes Lithography, Intaglio, Silkscreen as well as in woodcut and linocut. Since then this department is considered to be a major centre for printmaking, where a large number of Indian printmakers have obtained their initial training. The first batch contained only two students: P.D. Dhumal and his classmate Bhawani Shankar Sharma.

In the 1970s, Baroda led the Indian art scene. It did so by spearheading a departure from the rebelliousness of the sixties, a time when artists all over India were exploring and questioning the boundaries and limits of available languages of art and denouncing the norms of style. Artists of the seventies in Baroda moved away from the mood of defiance to emphasize the positive articulation of contemporary concerns and perspectives. Baroda achieved a great deal of progress during this decade. However, to adequately portray the atmosphere of 1970s, I think it is worthwhile to mention the name of a prominent woman artist Nasreen Mohamedi, who came to stay and teach drawing at Baroda. “Her work makes a definite move away from nature-bound imagery in the direction of abstraction. Giving up the free, calligraphic brushwork and its immediate tonal and textural seductions,”\textsuperscript{30} in the early 80s, she begins to use straight lines measured and drawn with the help of a geometrical scale, ‘mark by mark,’ a small ink drawing thus evolves into a grid-like structure, filling the entire page like a seismograph on which sand patterns or ripples on the surface of the sea are now precisely charted. “Nasreen carries the belief that the universe and the human mind alike share the sense of order and that the artist is charged with the function of eliminating the self and the capricious forms of nature to reveal this identity. This requires drastic reductions of all particularities to arrive at the simplest, most severe principles of form. The stripped form serves as the ‘symbol’ of a new and radical consciousness,”\textsuperscript{7} this was the principle on which the paintings of Mondrian and Malevich were conceived. Since then there have been several
uses of geometry in art. However, Nasreen maintained her identity by a combination of modesty, precision and severity.”

Say Geeta Kapur. This artist met with her untimely death in 1990.

In the 1970s, the Department of Art History demonstrated the self-critical awareness through the special composition of its staff, comprising of Ratan Parimoo, Vishnu Kumar Bhatt and Gulam M. Sheikh. “Parimoo’s vision of art history was designed as a departure from lingering historical tangles typically seen in museum studies or the practice of art history in departments of ancient Indian art, culture, archaeology and history, in Indian universities. In 1977, Parimoo initiated the first national seminar to reflect on the teaching art history. He argued for a curriculum that treated art history broadly as a humanistic discipline rather than one that was narrowly defined as a specialized adjunct of archaeology. He was engaged with the issue of how to formulate a new art history for India.”

However, the most interesting results in the field of fine arts awareness and aesthetics were achieved by the didactic devotion of some eminent painter-writers, such as Ratan Parimoo, G.M. Sheikh, Subramanyan and some of their colleagues. Here it is worthwhile to quote Ajay Sinha, “Subramanyan shaped the pedagogic goals of the college through the 1960s, and as dean, he continued to change the atmosphere of the college in the 1970s. A student entering Baroda’s Fine Arts Faculty in the early 1970, however, came more directly in contact with a new batch of artists-as-teachers, a small group of alumni that had recently returned from abroad to be appointed in various departments of the college, together with new members of the Baroda community itself. Subramanyan’s name had a sacred aura. It was felt in the way senior students, including some teachers, sat at the feet of the guru attending regular weekend lectures in the auditorium. Subramanyan encouraged his students to engage with a variety of materials in order to explore their suppleness and to coax out of them a linguistic principle responsive to the observed world.”

However, it is fair enough to mention some other eminent artists, who had put in great efforts to promote the methods of Art education in the Faculty for more than three decades, such as Ratan Parimoo, Jeram Patel, Jyoti Bhatt, Gulam M. Sheikh - to name a few. On the other hand, the pervasive interest in craft tradition, largely contributed to the emphasis at Baroda on design as the basic creative principle in the plastic arts. Nilima Sheikh believes that there has been a quest for functional parallels with living traditions, by the way of format, and in the narrativization of
time and space. “Witness painters Gulam M. Sheikh and Bhupen Khakhar and Subramanyan’s own expanding vocabulary of the seventies and eighties.”

Subramanyan has done interesting prints in all process of printmaking. For instance, we see that the earlier in his prints are ‘Nude on Chair’ 1955 and ‘Man with Fruit Cart’ 1956, both colour linocuts. Later on, he did lithographs such as ‘Girl in Interior’ 1977. In 1983, he did another powerful lithograph ‘Untitled.’ In this print, Subramanyan came to use drawing-like technique with the help of a pointed thin brush with hatching in different directions by a special litho pencil. This mysterious picture projects some kind of fearful demonstration of horned animals over the frightened woman. May be the hidden intention is to convey the brutality of the violent act of rape. The boldness of black areas enhanced the invisible forcible sexual action. After the great inhuman riots following the demolition of Babri Mosque 1992-93, Subramanyan did some powerful mixed media artworks and silkscreen prints, which reveal his masterly handling of such effective medium. Here, we may refer to his series ‘Visages of Grief’ 1994. Subramanyan is always at the top of the fine arts events; not as a viewer, but as a unique creator of visions, which convert quickly to such outstanding and individual expressive pictures, which later took their place in some prominent museums or in the residences of art-lovers, collectors and some other societies.

I think it is worthwhile to approach the significant monograph entitled ‘K.G. Subramanyan’ by Geeta Kapur. She says that she has gained from discussions with several artist friends, such as Jyoti Bhatt, in particular, who has, among other things, helped to prepare photographs for this monograph. In her introduction, Geeta points out; “Subramanyan has made use of woodcut printing for designing textiles. His curiosity about techniques, in the intricate tie and dye weaving of the ‘ikat’ fabric, may or may not enter his own work. It extends theoretically into an understanding of craft as practice; as a systematized process and convention and thus to understanding of art as a language.”

Geeta Kapur found in Baroda, a transient home, where much of her ideas and concerns took shape, for more than two decades; she concentrated her efforts for critical thinking on contemporary artistic issues evolved in Baroda through such gathering of minds. In fact, Geeta finds full play of polemic in the artist’s conceit as a craftsman and in the sheer diversity and inventiveness of his work. Ajay Sinha comments on Geeta’s writings: “These
essays, isolated from the large body of Geeta’s writings, as well as from the work of other writers discussed in “Envisioning the 1970s and the 1980s” provide conceptual markers for the richness of art criticism in Baroda in the seventies and eighties. The collective efforts of Baroda has pushed art criticism beyond the questions of the marketability of contemporary art out towards a broad framework for a meaningful conversation on art in contemporary India.”

Mentioning art criticism will open the door to have a look at some other activities in this realm such as the art critical industry of reviews in newspapers and popular magazines in national journals such as the Lalit Kala Contemporary and in monographs on contemporary artists published by the Lalit Kala Akademi, seemed more focused on the documentation and promotion of contemporary art than on the formulation of and dialogue on sustained issues. It was the artists, who often had the vocation to write, such as Gieve Patel in Bombay or J. Swaminathan in Delhi. Baroda also had a critical mass of such artist-writers including K.G. Subramanyan, Ratan Parimoo, G.M. Sheikh, Nilima Sheikh and Mala Marwah, who have all taken upon themselves the burden of criticism as well.

With little resource and improvisation, lino and woodblock prints were also used to illustrate and serve as book jackets for the literary journals consecutively brought out by some eminent Gujarati literature. Sheikh persuaded friendly printers to mount lino in place of conventional metal plate on the wooden block and have it run directly on the press. “In this way, literary magazines like ‘Kshitij’ and later ‘Vrishchik’ the periodical on art and ideas, edited by Sheikh and Khakhar from 1969-73, used to have as cover and illustrations original prints by several local artists such as Vinodray Patel, D. Devraj, Bhupen Khakhar, Jyoti Bhatt, Vinod Shah, Sheikh and Subramanyan. Five hundred copies of each issue were printed.” “Vrishchik’ provided a forum for ongoing discussions of art and literature, matched in its commitment, only more recently, perhaps, by the ‘Journal of Arts and Ideas,’ of which Vivan Sundaram and Geeta Kapur are the founder members.

Vivan Sundaram, though a Delhi based artist, was the product of Baroda’s painting department around the mid-sixties. He often co-operates with the Faculty; he helped in conducting two successful workshops for printmaking in the years 1973 and 1974. Let us quote him; “Here at Baroda in November 1973, twenty-two artists from Hyderabad, Delhi, Bombay, Santiniketan and Baroda made etchings, silkscreens and lithographs. A total of
eleven hundred prints were produced with an edition of fifty. These prints have been shown in Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Bombay, Delhi, Lucknow, Banaras and Baroda. 16

I think, it is better to go through the names of the participants; here from Baroda, K.G. Subramanyan, Vinod Dave, Archana Kumar, Bhupen Khakhar, Vivan Sundaram and Jaidev Thakore. All of them did lithographs, except for Archana, who did etching, while Gulam M. Sheikh did woodcut and Nilima Sheikh did linocut. From Delhi, Jogen Chowdhary, Satish Gupta and Jai Zharotia did etching. The Parekhs - Madhvi and Manu - also from Delhi did silkscreen. From Santiniketan, Somnath Hore did etching and Hare Krishna Bag did lithograph. Deepak Banerjee from Banaras did colour etching. I think I forgot Pravin Patel from Baroda, who did silkscreen. Still one significant name is missing, that is, the architect of Baroda’s printmaking - Jyoti Bhatt - who is one of the prominent names here in India as well as abroad. Unlike them all, Bhatt goes for photoengraving. We try here to reveal some of his advanced characteristics, which concern the photographic processes. He is also a trendsetter of this new attitude - I mean the way he uses his photographic imagery processes in different, yet interesting way, using his intellectual, amazing and personal compositions. These new innovative activities yielded their opening fruits during the famous printmaking workshop of 1973.

Though Sheikh is an eminent painter and art history lecturer, he did some powerful prints too. He was one of Baroda’s participants in the famous Paul Lingren’s workshop in Delhi in 1970. To reveal his powerful handling of printmaking techniques, let us quote Krishna Chaitanya; “...But the only piece with tense social relevance was Gulam Mohammed Sheikh’s powerful etching entitled ‘The Riot’ - a group exhibition - Dhoomimal - Delhi, 1974.” 19 Two months later, Chaitanya wrote again; this time revealing some of Baroda Group’s new characteristics of painting, this was at the occasion of the group exhibition in Rabindra Bhavan; “Here, we see more varied group, the pop tradition was prolonged in the work of Gulam M. Sheikh, Bhupen Khakhar and Vivan Sundaram. But the creative intention has passed beyond the Dada’s terminal, which began as anti-aestheticism, but ended up in a closed aestheticism. Khakhar, if he paints a barber shop, paints a factory strike too; Sheikh uses surrealist imagery, but makes helpfully transparent and intelligible to depict human oppression and cruelty. Sundaram’s ‘Wall’ seemed pure pop at first, but the juxtaposition of
the gold course and the slum, hermetically insulated from each other by the high wall, packed a lot of trenchant social criticism."^{17}

I think it is worthwhile to highlight some particular aspects concerning the above mentioned workshop of Paul Lingren. It was the evening of the year 1970, when Prof. Paul Lingren from U.S.A. had conducted his famous intaglio workshop with the help of USIS. Artists from all over India attended this outstanding opportunity; from Baroda, Jyoti Bhatt, Bhupen Khakhar, Ghulam M. Sheikh and P.D. Dhumal^{12} represented the department. "The workshop proved to be an example to the rest of the country of Baroda's expertise and reputation. The significance of Baroda from then on was acknowledged."^{19} Lingren gave the progressive example to all the participants, who were in the field of teaching printmaking. "He showed each individual artist how to use the needles, burins and scrapers that constitute the printmaker's tools; how to bevel the edges of a plate, how long to keep a plate in the acid to obtain just the right effect. In fact, his work extends all the way from questioning the aesthetic values of an artist's print to helping a young student to acquire deep understanding of the quality and originality of printmaking. Lingren believes that the learning process never stops."^{18} Such excellent experience very much benefited the printmaking of Baroda.

A unique experiment was carried out in Oct.-Nov., 1974, at the Faculty under the auspices of the Amrita Sher-Gil Committee to popularize printmaking by making a large edition of prints to be sold at reduced rate. Twenty-two artists participated in the workshop, which included well-known and young printmakers from various parts of the country, who made fifty editions of their prints. The experiment proved to be a success as its Bombay exhibition has shown and is expected to travel to a number of cities in India.

As we see, Baroda's art scene these days was in a tremendous upheaval, healthy and promising, the interaction between artists was very obvious and very effective. Bhatt and his colleagues at Baroda, including the new generation benefited from this artistic atmosphere, and each one of them came to enrich his knowledge and experience. Some of these artists came to play an energetic role in Baroda's printmaking field during the last three decades, such as Jeram Patel b.1930, V.R. Patel b.1933,^{13} Bhupen Khakhar b.1934,^{14} Naina Dalal b.1935, Ratan Parimoo b.1936,^{15} V.S. Patel c.1937,^{16} G.M. Sheikh b.1937,^{17} Jayant Parikh b.1940,^{18} Jaidev Thakore b.1943,^{19} Nilima Sheikh b.1945, P.D. Dhumal b.1945,^{20} Rini Dhumal b.1948 - to name a few. All the above artists did, or at least tried their hands in the
art of prints. Nilima Sheikh was influenced by the decorative design of Persian manuscript illustrations and has an important role in the field of art criticism, needless to mention that she is also a good painter. Haroon Khimani also did some interesting woodcuts. To my mind, these artists, including the elder veterans, and of course, the master of printmaking techniques, Jyoti Bhatt, are very intellectual artists and they all helped very much to create a healthy atmosphere to establish the renaissance of Baroda's 'Plastic Art.' However, the old veterans and some of the above-mentioned names, are the real builders of Baroda's printmaking.

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Reaching this important juncture, I think it is quite essential to state in brief some of Baroda's meticulous and active printmakers, such as the veteran artist Vinodray Patel and others of the younger generation such as Jayant Parikh, Jaidev Thakore, P.D. Dhumal and the one who may be considered as the master etcher of contemporary India; of course, Laxma Goud.

Let us discuss one of the above-mentioned artists, V.R. Patel, who was a student in the fifties of the same batch as Vinod Shah and Gulam M. Sheikh, and like them, later joined the teaching staff at the Faculty. Nilima Sheikh, elaborates on some of Patel's printmaking qualities, “Enviably dexterous, even as a student, he picked up all kinds of articulation with a sleight of hand. His lessons in compositional craft came from Bendre, but his special flair for design certainly received impetus from the design skills of Subramanyan. He developed an unerring hand and the confidence of a virtuoso, quite unexpected in an otherwise reticent, even shy person. He could execute boldly designed painting, finely nuanced and elegant prints, lively children's books and stylish graphics with equal aplomb.”

Patel was attracted to the American Pop art movement in the late sixties. However, it is better to mention first as to how he was influenced by the naive and innocent prints of Magan. Although, Magan's impact on such a master of printmaking may not be obvious, but there is a certain aspect that indicates a correlation between the prints of the two artists. Let us have a look at Patel's most interesting linocut series titled 'News Item.' Though this series of linoprints was executed around the mid-eighties, there is some kind of relation or connection between Patel's series and Magan's free-hand rendering of a village life and the
conventions of rural art that are depicted in his spontaneous prints. It is advisable here to refer to Magan’s lithoprint ‘Untitled’ c.1966.\textsuperscript{24}

Patel’s lithoprints of this period such as ‘Go East’ 1969\textsuperscript{25} were a response to the so-called hippie culture and also the American Pop Art movement. His images here had an exotic function and the predilection for the zany lent levity and dispersed ironical comments, making for corny humour.

Ratan Parimoo wrote the following about V.R. Patel’s work; “His lithographs are mostly nude compositions made of buxom voluptuous features with exaggerated femininity achieved by accentuating the curves of hips and breasts. Their long hair float in waves; the hands are raised upwards or cover the faces as if in shame. Their movements are languorous, as if controlled by some external power. The fatalism and the melancholy of the somnambulistic figures with the recurring presence of the sinuous motif of a cobra makes the theme of these lithos quite puzzling.”\textsuperscript{20} A good example for such theme is his lithoprint ‘Untitled’ 1969.\textsuperscript{26} Generally speaking, Patel’s pictures have an undeniable quality of breadth and spatial ease. He has fully integrated the lesson learnt as a printmaker with his own personality, which is distinct and vital. In fact, we can see that the play of the darks and whites and the vital pliability of his draughtsmanship make an immediate impression.\textsuperscript{13} Some of his prints of the 70s and early 80s are jocular reflections of the socio-political situation. Either sensuous thin lines or a mass of vigorously scratched lines activate the figures in black. The space around is enhanced by numerous textural strokes complementing the walking figures that dominate the two-dimensional surface. It is a long time since a printmaker has explored the graphic medium with such vitality.

Patel’s idiom is also varied in form like many other Indian artists, but conforms to a pattern of strategically, stylized narration. The frozen emblems of his saga defy gravitational laws, and are unheeding of their expected roles. A figure, whether grotesque or mutely watchful, manages, in either case, to project the underlying sense of menace in the world of V.R. Patel; a world of topsy-turvy fabula and existential quasi-truths. He asserts, “I like to borrow images from magazines and other printed materials and transfer them to the silkscreen. Other things, which I like, are overprinted, overpasted posters on the street corner with some calligraphy or graffiti on top of it. I select an image I like and then look around for other images that relate to it in some way. I do not know exactly what the relationship will be
beforehand, but I know it when I see it.\textsuperscript{2} However, Patel quitted this attitude around the early 80s.

In fact, V.R. Patel is one of the fine eminent artists of modern India. He has taken part in many important exhibitions in India and abroad during the last three decades. He was the recipient of the National Award several times since 1961. However, for him, it is rather difficult to explain why he likes to paint what he paints or why he makes the prints that he does, but he always goes after his feelings. For him, there is no difference between reality and abstraction; that is, what he is trying to express through subjective compositions. On the other hand, Patel was the first printmaker in Baroda to use plastic sheets for his line engravings (as a substitute for the conventional, but expensive metal plates). However, when using this process, he depicts similar imagery as in the lithographs.

Working in different kinds of mediums, such as woodcut, lithography, silkscreen and engraving on acrylic sheet at different times, Patel’s more recent works employ linocut with maximum freedom. Shivaji Panikkar has observed: “The narrative aspect in them is positively derived from the experience of children’s book illustrations done both in silkscreen and linocuts, which have endowed them with a synoptic quality, individualistic and distinct. The arbitrary approach in composing images on the lino sheet, the artist does not begin with a preplanned drawing or an idea. The images are realized in organic relation with one another and their readability is open-ended. The untitled series of sixteen linocut prints that began in 1984,\textsuperscript{22,23} still remains incomplete – till March 1994.\textsuperscript{28} These are concerning man-woman relation, wherein the broadly delineated human images treated in flat silhouetted forms are attributed with three dimensionality by incorporating fine linear and textural articulations.”\textsuperscript{22}

In Patel’s prints, we can see certain qualities similar to those previous imageries, besides, the textural patterns are directional in guiding the rhythm of the forms. “The playful enlivened light heartedness in the movements somehow contradicts with the distortions of the human figures, which are poignant with a kind of terrifying malignance. The organic and angular stylization is comparable to primitive art. The half human and half female figures stand horizontally displaying their voluptuousness, lie helplessly, and the men in contrast sit, stand or confront in winning supremacy.”\textsuperscript{23}

These kind of impressive images are depicted in black and white delineation in order to create a kind of mysterious atmosphere full of expressive figures and suggestive forms.
His human beings recreated in a meaningful order and gestured to some other deep intentions. Looking at such print; perceiving its language, will heighten our love for art and allow us to discover the special characteristics of Patel's outstanding career. His printmaking approaches are greatly enhanced by the exquisite movements of the hands and fingers while probing deeper to portray some kind of a new representation more expressive than those of pantomime shows. In fact, it is the exceptional language created by this soft-spoken genius - V.R. Patel, who always succeeds in these kinds of projections, which easily mesmerizes us and touches our hearts. Really words are disabled to portray this kind of magic.

I find it unnecessary to waste our time and kill our enjoyment by talking about the technical qualities or the functions of his image-making, which are minor, especially, when we are face to face with such outstanding and striking masterpieces. Let us quickly go through his lyrical movements of lines, figures, textures, decorative elements and such; let us go beyond all these ordinary qualities to find out what is the secret behind the magical effect of his prints. Let us examine some other approaches to find out some other kind of aesthetics to face such kind of challenges. We can rightly consider V.R. Patel as one of the major builders of printmaking in Baroda.

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Jayant Parikh, who obtained his post-diploma in painting in 1962 has a different point of view, unlike his Baroda colleagues, who think that graphic is a technique of taking prints. It is not only that; says Parikh, this wonderful medium has its character and can be developed in different ways through different media. The totality of Parikh's artistic concern can be seen in varying intensity and quality in mural, oil painting and graphics. Building up the collograph blocks by the additive process is always prepared to suit the full imperial paper size, its speedy finish while still maintaining the emotional association.

Unlike most other artists, who came to study or teach and then stayed on, Jaidev Thakore, who obtained his post-diploma in painting in 1965, grew up in Baroda. "He stands out as an artist for whom the small scale of things has been of fundamental value, both in life and work. He picks up motifs of animals, birds, erotica and landscape details, as well as design devices, from a variety of sources. Besides Rajasthani and Pahari miniatures, he borrows from folk and tribal traditions. He used a blend of humour and the exotic image and concocted an amusing idiom developed from personal whimsy and flights of fancy."
uses fun and the funny to puncture the serious business of making art. Irreverence prompts malicious fun and transgressive sex in his painting.\(^{24}\)

In fact, Baroda's Graphic Department was very active in all its sections - linocut, lithoprints, etching and later on silkscreen prints. We can find the forerunners of each technique and they always worked as a team with great zeal and deep feeling of enjoyment and powerful demand for experimentation and the trial-and-error-process. However, when we look at the prolific products of prints and the different types of subject matter and goals, we see that the fields for spreading these prints to serve the needs of society, as we stated before. By this time the mid-70s, we see Vinod S. Patel and his younger colleague P.D. Dhumal taking charge of production sets of original prints by senior artists teaching at the Faculty, senior students and alumni. These were printed to be sold singly or in portfolios. In fact, V.S. Patel is one of the best silkscreen printmakers; his works show utmost craftsmanship, finish and accuracy, using photographic means to maximize the collage-like quality in his works.\(^{16}\)

He incorporates the printed Devnagri and Roman scripts along with motifs of landscape and architecture. The flat brilliant colour areas modulate into fine tonal gradations, where the facility of overlapping are discretely employed so as to achieve a dreamlike surreal quality in the print.

Though printmaking activity in Baroda is centered round the Graphic Arts Department of the Faculty of Fine Arts, some artists later on, around the mid-seventies possessed their individual etching techniques. This is due to the fact that most of the artists are either on the staff or are students of the Faculty and the department offers facilities in various printmaking media besides etching. The popularity of etching and silkscreen may be due to the fact that a lot of printmakers, who are also painters, would like to experiment with various methods and techniques to create effects similar to those achieved in painting. As a result, artists start to use combined methods like relief with intaglio in etching and photography and drawing in silkscreen. In this regard, the work and guidance of K.G. Subramanyan and Jyoti Bhatt has been the chief source of inspiration for many students over the years.

It was the prominent achievement of the 1970s, which opened a new chapter in the history of Baroda's printmaking. Besides, it is also true to say; with the help of these adequate facilities of the Graphic Department, Baroda built up its advanced printmaking
curriculum on the lines of foreign institutions and the department was to avail the students of similar facilities to acquire a strong technical grounding; further more experimentation on conventional lines was encouraged. Though this department was the first of its kind, it helped to enhance the importance of such an institution, which set apart printmaking as an art - as important as any other medium of fine arts. “Here, graphics had no set trend, no school of thought to back it and limit it in any manner. Baroda’s ancient gurus managed to imbibe in the students not only aesthetic appeal for the subject but also a personal interest.” It acquired a stylistic character, which is aroused, out of its surrounding environment of the department. This however helps to create some kind of atmosphere through the new generation of printmakers, who were all in their youth and their representation come to symbolize the basic urges, and sometimes even Bohemian longings and care-free attitudes marked by close interactions.

Such kind of inevitable and expressive attitude was a natural phenomenon. This era was also marked by organic phallic symbolism and identification is done with a human being’s basic sensuousness. As was stated earlier, P.D.Dhumal, Laxma Goud, and the sculptor Deepak Kannal were the forerunners in this field. However, it is interesting to mention here that the most deeply influenced by this atmosphere was Jeram Patel, the eminent artist and the teacher in Graphic Design Department. In fact, the younger artists followed his footsteps.

They have seen Jeram Patel draw with pen and ink stark black and white images of obsessive sexual phantasmagoria. Energy was identified as phallic puissance. It is interesting to observe that Laxma Goud drew in these sources and plugged them into the dreams and nightmares of adolescent sexuality into the landscape, animals and persona of his boyhood days. He permeated his drawings with surreal libidinous inhabitants and a throbbing expressionist quest. Laxma has been a printmaker of exceptional significance, because his medium or let us say his graphic delineation was integral to the quest of his art. His landscapes sprout phallic mounds and found arbors in the deep of the night.

It was in 1981, when Khakhar extended his fascination with the corruptible mass culture and pop-symbol religion into his desire to come out with his homosexuality: He took off his clothes and murmured, “If I can’t please all, then I am going to please myself.” I think Khakhar in pleasing himself goes far in capturing pleasure from here and there, but what
intrigues us is that he started doing some beautiful prints depicting his homosexuality and
masturbation of the meek, hopeless old men, unlike those of P.D. Dhumal, Jeram Patel, Laxma Goud, etc. All these attitudes were coming from some temporary sources and hasty
influences and the appealing power of sexual imagery and the proud, alert manly organ. In all
these cases, the phallics are always excited and searching for intercourse. It might be Picasso,
who initiated such sexual representations long time ago. However, one also can see some
eamples here or there, especially, in the Far East, African sculpture and beyond the Atlantic
Ocean.

“These trends are however isolated and few and far in between. In fact, Baroda’s
printmaking in these days has had no marked trend. Individualistic approach and expression
is encouraged and with the well-equipped studios provided, a student was supposed to
explore and find further avenues for their personal style. In the graphic department, the
students usually worked together, which made things easier. To cultivate the working in
group atmosphere in the department, it has been setting up workshops where national or
international printmakers come and work in the studio exposing both Faculty members and
the students to an atmosphere of community work.”

The Exceptional Master of Printmaking

I think we cannot go further before we come to state the powerful role of the live-
wire of Baroda’s printmaking. It is P.D. Dhumal, the expert and progressive master of
printmaking activities, which was created due to his efforts and also his colleagues efforts
and achieved those wonderful qualities of Baroda’s advanced techniques in the art of prints.
So let us go through his printmaking achievements to reveal one of the most splendid pages
of Baroda’s graphic art history.

P.D. Dhumal is most notable among the second generation of the printmakers, he is
considered as the owner of the secrets of printmaking know-how, due to his enormous
understanding of this medium as a technique and as an outstanding process for doing
exceptional and expressive images. These images have their own inherent charm, which
depends on the ‘Plastic Art’ quality of the picture, and the powerful rendering of the graphic
qualities.

From his first beginning, Dhumal showed promise and potential. G.M. Sheikh stated
about his work in 1976, “His work, though eclectic and still growing, is marked by his
restless desire to seek a personal image. He has a sharp acumen and tenacity to try out various methods and media to their fullest. In his etchings, he has used combinations of intaglio and relief with competence and skill. His often heavily erotic imagery has surrealistic overtones, for example, curious phallus-lizards charging on or hovering around vaginal crevices of mountains and beasts, or often a horse set against a bare landscape with sparsely mushrooming trees that hold a rather curious rectangular frame in the middle. Sprinkled with a touch of ennui and the macabre or erotic drama, his prints show vitally potential directions.

I think the most significant landmark in Dhumal's printmaking career is the famous printmaking workshop of USIS-New Delhi, 1970, which was being conducted by Poul Lingren, Professor of Art at San Diego State College, California. This four-month printmaking camp-workshop reveals the progressive method of teaching and instruction given by Prof. Paul Lingren; "My primary concern in the workshop is with the individual, I am concerned that each one does successful work while I allow the artists complete freedom to explore his own process. I emphasize the importance of developing good work habits." The atmosphere in his workshop shows the studies going on in concentration, the artists revealing their experience in various phases of creation, from the genesis of an idea, through aspects of execution, to an intense exchange with colleagues. Dhumal was one of the best participants in this workshop. By this time of the early 70s, Dhumal had acquired very high quality of the know-how of printmaking techniques. It is interesting to know, though that Dhumal was at the time of the above-mentioned camp a student just finishing his first year of M.F.A. (Graphics), he benefited very much from this camp. Year after year, his expertise and techniques was growing up steadily and perfectly. Now-a-days, Dhumal is considered as one of the best printmakers of the country, and also his graphic department is, in fact, the best in the country without any exaggeration. Since the late 1992, he became the officiating dean of the faculty.

Concerning Dhumal's powerful printmaking, Nilima Sheikh has observed: "His interest in the graphic image led him to learn the allied sciences that are necessary for a holistic understanding of printmaking. The chemistry of the graphic components - pigments, binders and inks, papermaking, improvisations on the press - each of these would come under Dhumal's obsessive scrutiny. With his sharp mind and dogged persistence, he enriched the
science of printmaking at Baroda over the years, as well as developed the Department of Graphics, where he has taught since 1976."

Certain artists like P.D. Dhumal have contributed to Baroda in more than one way. Not only because he is a leading printmaker today, but he has personally taken over half of the department. He continued giving his guidance and supervision even after he became the Dean of the Faculty. "Dhumal has seen this department from its early days and has been behind many of its developments. In his management, in his technical expertise and in advice to students, he is a father figure. He has experimented with many mediums," but identifies with the intaglio-aquatint method most. His works are symbolic, semi-surrealistic, expressionistic and a representation of the sub-conscious." The basic human nature is seen in his own subjective manner. The phallic symbol is presented in a surrealistic delineation in an environment made up of feminine curves; depths and physical forms are a basis for his work of the seventies. However, he still uses this symbol from time to time. Just like the famous psychoanalyst Freud's theory, Dhumal has represented the world and his surroundings, typifying it to the core of the sensual in human nature."

Dhumal has the tendency to interweave motifs of design along with that of passion, at once animalistic, but almost orgiastic and yet controlled at the same time, striking a balance between intuitive image and its conscious, the net result being an often deliberately ordered execution. He is that kind of printmaker, who is as much concerned with technical bravura as with its integration with the content of the print. As an expert in printmaking processes Dhumal approaches his materials masterfully, deeply acquired the know-how of the core of the printmaking expressive quality. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who are either lost in the vagaries of exotic motifs or surface variations of the plate by its over-erosion in acid, Dhumal has the making of a printmaker, who is as much concerned with technical bravura as with its integration with the content of the print. Recently, Dhumal did a number of powerful etchings in black and white, presenting all his previous qualities accept the subject matter. His new themes have a slight touch of some social or political issues, he took more to simplicity than to modifying his themes, through semiabstract gestures mixed with naive-like figures and lines, the result is more expressive, individual, and innovative.

In fact, Dhumal is one of the few printmakers in the country, who has managed to grasp the proper technique to handle perfectly the art of print, which is set within empty
landscapes and architectural settings of the early phase. It is relevant to quote Shivaji Panikkar, "Each possible medium within graphic art, though having its own special qualities and particular facilities, any attempt at classifying the totality in these terms, seems to be unconvincing. This has to be so, as far as the ultimate intention remains an insight into the aesthetic premise and concern. How a specific medium and its technical specifications play a role in the formal make up of a print is significant. At the same time, the validity of an artist's language can be seen growing beyond such constructions." Being a perfectionist in technique, Dhumal has used all the possibilities of his medium to advantage. His lithograph in colour, 'On the Way to Udaipur' 1990 is in itself one of his masterpieces. In this work and others alike, we see that Dhumals works have an extreme tonal variation, and even though he often uses just one colour in his works, because of his fascinating love for this particular colour, firstly, to embrace his friendly colour and give it the potential power to express itself further, secondly, to initiate that wonderful dialogue between his own individuality and the powerful personality of the colour. The result is a print with a soul with spiritual power, a living creature and one that never dies. This is the real quality of Dhumal's print.

Dhumal has worked on few prints over the years, yet each is a masterpiece by itself. His most significant etching untitled in the early 1990s is a large head of an animal; perhaps a depiction of the head of water-bull or something alike. It seems to be a representation of all that he has done. "The head, being the most significant part of any animal or being, is forceful in itself. Done in colour, almost monotone, this head is very phallic, a protrusion in space full of thrust. The symbolic representation of the head of an animal and the phallic connotation is reversible and brings two sides into total balance at once; so that one is left speculating on the actual image and yet, wonders at the totality. Such works that are at once so universal and subtle are the basis of his forms and content. Being few and far in between, their impact is direct. Dhumal has lived up to this image. He almost negates the consistent working capacity of an artist by presenting us with one masterly work - which speaks for the totality and vastness in a composite print." Says Jayati Mukharjee.

In Dhumal's prints, we deeply enjoy the language of printmaking creations, the elements that concern the dynamic power of composition. The boldness and effective power of the forms, lines textures, space, the conflict between background and foreground, the dark
values invade the white areas, the harshness of the powerful lines appealing the feminine gestures and the sensitive sensual hints to cope with this captivating atmosphere. When looking at Dhumal's prints, it is better to forget all about the subject matter and leave such things out of our focus. We should observe, instead, the artistic quality of the print itself. By this process, we can revel in the magic quality of its rare beauty that is often not available in many a graphic art product.

Still a few more things remain to be mentioned about Dhumal printmaking career. "I would like first to insert this simple information concerning my student days in the Graphics Department during 1990-92 under the two distinguished Dhumals - P.D. Dhumal and Rini. They are still very helpful to me in my research for Ph.D., especially when, from time to time, they gave me some valuable catalogues concerning what is going on in the printmaking activities all over India. Secondly, I wish to reveal what Charles Stroh wrote to me in the early 1994 about the masterly technical expertise of Dhumal's printmaking know-how." The American professor has observed, "I am trained as a lithographer. I did a workshop in Udaipur in 1990 for fifteen Indian artists. I had talked with other artists all over India about lithography many times. What I always hear was this: 'In India, we do not have good inks, good papers, good rollers, good presses and we have the problems of bad maintenance of equipment. Besides, we do not have the chemicals that are used to make good lithographs. Nonsense! The workshop in Udaipur was in very bad condition when I arrived. I had many things repaired and started to try to find some things needed in the market, but the artists in Udaipur told me that the things I needed were not available and that we could not do what I wanted to do. When P.D. Dhumal came to Udaipur, he went with me to the market and we found every single chemical and ink modifier and drier and powder that we needed to make good lithographs. Dhumal is a wonderful example of an Indian artist, who is not willing to settle for the status quo. He is curious and always interested in making things better."

In fact, Dhumal always makes things better; the mentioned observation depends on my personal experience, when I was receiving training under him in the Graphics department. Just before asking for help, he comes to know that I was facing a problem or doing something the wrong way, therefore, he would come and give the help of his blessed hand. He solved our work problems very effectively and gave all his students a fillip to do
better prints. In brief, Dhumal has a matchless quality as a printmaker as well as an instructor. Baroda should be proud of such kind of exceptional printmakers.

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Let us now leave behind this enlightening discussion of Baroda’s printmaking history and go a little ahead to highlight, in brief, some other aspects of Baroda’s new generation. We will be able to state only a very few names, so let us first approach the interesting work of Rekha Rodwittiya. In her recent etchings, we may find something different with a definite feminist accent and formulated to project metaphoric sexual images. This kind of attitude is suitable for those who created an atmosphere of conflict and resistance. But they often find superficial issues or old ideology to raise battles and start fighting from behind curtains or fences, to protect their weaknesses within and perhaps, their hidden desires and passions. They are always masked to hide their meek features as well as their humble feminist weapons. They often commit mistakes and do the things the other way. Meanwhile, they seek rewards and are eager to be interviewed for the sake of propaganda and some other feminist concerns. In fact, we can not say all of them fit this description. To be fair, there are some female artists, who are pretty good. Here in Baroda, there are a few exceptional names.

However, let us first go through the recent prints of Rekha. The most striking of the explicitly feminist artists to emerge at this time, Rekha Rodwittiya usually presents her prolific output alongside written autobiographical statements, and thus a framing narrative that sets her apart from any of her contemporaries. Rekha later on started experimenting with the graphic medium to discover that she took strongly to etching around the mid-90s, when she did a good number of successful etchings in ‘Dhumal’s Graphic Studio.’ Rekha has achieved recognition abroad and participated in many significant shows in India and also in Western and Eastern countries.

Two top ‘All India Printmaking Exhibitions’ took place in the year 1985. The first exhibition was organized by Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, under the name, ‘Graphic Art in India Since 1850.’ The second was organized by Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay, under the name, ‘Indian Printmaking Today, 1985.’ From Baroda, three painter-printmakers participated in both the exhibitions: Jyoti Bhatt, Jayant Parikh and Rini Dhumal. Jeram Patel, N.B. Joglekar and Naina Dalal, however, participated only in the first one.
In 1986, Paul Lingren visited Baroda and an intaglio workshop was set up. “In 1989, Kapp and Munir from Spain came to set up a multiple plate workshop of colour intaglio. Charles Stroh from U.S.A. also set up a lithography workshop in early 1990. In 1991, Tim Mara of Royal College, London, visited the Department and worked for a week. These expert visitors generated an atmosphere of working together for creation and expression and many new techniques and methods were found and experimentation done.”

By this time, Baroda had become a very famous graphic centre. Baroda alumni now hold important posts in several state art colleges, from Assam and Kashmir to Kerala, and apparently art education in Bangladesh is almost entirely handled by the seventies onward graduates, who returned to their country to establish a new era of contemporary Indian printmaking. Here, in Baroda, we see some other significant alumni from the younger generation, who achieved very interesting prints since the early years of this decade. Names, such as Jayanti Rabadia,*34 Vijay Bagodi,*35 Surendran,*36 Sethuram*37 and Shibu Natesan – to name a few. These printmakers approached different types of materials as well as passed through different kinds of styles and themes. In fact, they brought a new blood to the current movement of printmaking in Baroda. We hope to see a new revolutionary movement, especially when the new generation will be able to get the front seat as the new builders of the future renaissance of the coming era (beyond the year 2000). However, it is more relevant to discuss, instead, about the veteran printmaker Jyoti Bhatt, who is considered as an architect of Baroda’s printmaking and is one of the outstanding builders of graphic art in India today.

JYOTI BHATT
The Architect of Baroda’s Printmaking

The oeuvre of Jyoti Bhatt, perhaps best illustrates the dominant art trends in Baroda, especially from the mid-fifties. He was the first artist to receive the Gold Plaque of Lalit Kala Akademi in 1955, when he was only 21. His prize-winning work was done in the technique and style of Indian miniatures.” Ratan Parimoo has acquired ample experience and knowledge about the Baroda-based artists since he himself is one of them and both Bhatt and Parimoo are the products of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, since 1951. Parimoo observes, “Bhatt’s early works have a lyrical beauty of their own revealing his predilection for the
decorative and the craftsmanly attitude. He tried to analyze light in terms of colour facets as in the ‘Lamp’ series combined with still-life studies, the lamp was the principal motif. The problem was to unite the source of light with the illuminated area into an integrated whole.”

Bhatt’s ‘Krishnaleela’ 1954,1 is a student project for mural design, for which he won the above-mentioned award. One is immediately arrested by a prodigious craftsmanship patiently and carefully worked out to the last detail. The work contains linguistic tricks from traditional sources. There is a flattening of space by the reduction of dimension, as also a deliberate attempt at pictorial rhythm enhanced by the use of linear articulation. Linear conventions from the miniature tradition are used in the rendering of water and foliage.

Significant among his early works, before going on a scholarship to Italy, is his oil painting ‘Despair’ 1955-56.2 In this painting, the Western Cubist style and its influence is apparent. Interestingly, this style also attracted his guru N.S. Bendre. Bhatt did this powerful composition of the two women and their helpless children just before his final examinations for post-diploma ‘Painting.’ In ‘Fear,’ oil on canvas, 1956,3 we see the same cubist style, the same powerful composition and dynamic lines, the contrast between the foreground and the background, as well as the dark values of the woman and her child and the white aggressive bull, the frightful atmosphere, the snake-like tail of the offensive big-horned bull. Moving to his small yellow ochre painting ‘Summer’ 1957, we see, Bhatt following the compositional style of his teacher K.G. Subramanyan, still retaining the accent and the beautiful design of his own individual style. On the other hand, we see that Bhatt was attached to printmaking from the very beginning. The need to explore led him to look around. He found the work of Krishna Reddy, who held exhibitions of his work in India in 1958-59, to be very impressive. Having started experimenting with intaglio technique, Bhatt soon achieved commendable results, and used this new process in his prints that looked like impasto. The irregular textures as well as the unexpected colours create a vibrant surface, luminous and solid, which otherwise can not be achieved.

The active researcher Jayanti Mukherjee describes these significant developments, citing Bhatt first and the striking outlook of his composition and how he linked his powerful imagery with the images from different sources; largely those of Krishna Reddy, whose exhibitions in India in this period imparted a great influence and powerful impact on many artists of the day. “Viscosity was the new magic produced by the genius of Indian universal
printmaking techniques. Bhatt was keenly fascinated by the viscosity effect, because he found in them a parallel to his painting that he did in heavy impasto. He was in search of such a parallel printing medium, which could give similar results. But it took him a few years time to master the technique, because in the Indian scene, the method was not familiar. Moving to his mixed media print, ‘A Girl with a Parrot,’ we see this to be an interesting linocut, offset and lithograph print, 1960, in which we see the beautiful rendering of the linear quality and meaningful decorative elements enhanced by the captivating array of light green and light pink that fill up free areas in the background and also enrich some other areas in the foreground. Both offset and lithograph beautifully enhance the black lines of the linocut impression, making it a combination of the three mediums.

‘La Dona Concavallo’ colour-linocut and silkscreen, Naples, Italy, 1961 features three figures: a woman, a horse and the sun - all in multi-decorative manner, with plain background. The horse in green and yellow variation of tones is rather musical. The over-decorated woman exposing feminine beauty from underneath her white and profusion of decorative motifs culminating into a circus-like atmosphere. This owes to Bhatt’s taking to Western themes and designs, but without an adequate exposure and experience. His indulgence is in vain to fill this picture with those undesirable, superficial and poor decorations. When inquired why he had quit the boldness of his earlier works, his reply was: “I dislike repeating even the quality of boldness, I can easily do it, but why should I? Should it be because of its high quality? I deeply love the sensitive and delicate qualities. I appreciate those tender characteristics in my picture more than these bold and concrete figures and masses, I often did in my early works.” When looking at his pen and ink drawing ‘Spring’ 1962, we see the hasty and brisk line drawing delineation and feel the masterly rendering of each line. There is real life in this youthful attractive Italian lady; her suggestive gesture and her seductive look, turning her head and pressing her hands showing nicely her hidden breasts, allowing the feminist quality of her inviting body to send an alluring message to the eager eyes. This picture marked the end of Bhatt’s first phase between 1955-1962.

Around this time, Bhatt started shooting very successful photographs using his camera to capture some outstanding still life works such as his photograph ‘Part of a Stone,’ which portrays a portion from an ancient Italian pillar with rich colours as if it were a very
powerful abstract painting. In Italy - 1961-62 - he discovered a special new formula of adhesive and was fascinated by its potential as a binding medium, even by the possibility of raised surfaces it created. When this material became available here in Baroda, very soon after he came back from Italy; many of Baroda's artists were quite drastically influenced by the course of modern art of Baroda for the next decade and every one took to sticking and smearing things on their canvases and boards with this adhesive (Fevicol), or like Jeram Patel, just spilled shapes onto the surface and in burnt recesses of plywood. These efforts were dependent on trail-and-error process. There were other mediums, which also drastically influenced the course of modern art in Baroda in the mid-50s. These mediums are woodcut and linocut, which were the premier graphic mediums. Large and ambitious woodcuts were vigorously executed and printed with considerable tour de force. It was quite the favoured way of working out complex graphic schemes in colour-one, which offered a physical engagement special to the medium. Experiments in colour techniques and size interested young artists such as Vinodray Patel, Haroon Khimani, Shanti Dave, Jyoti Bhatt, and later G.M. Sheikh and Jayant Parikh. However, the prints of Bhatt at this time acquired the quality of superb craftsmanship and also announced the emergence of an artist of great promise that Bhatt truly is. Soon, he shed his sentimental attachment to an outworn technique for something that belonged to his time and which was fast attaining international acceptance as a legitimate visual language.

Bhatt was born in Bhavnagar in 1934. He belongs to the first batch of students and studied painting under the able guidance of Bendre and Subramanayan. He did his Post-diploma course in 1956 and then he studied graphic art on an Italian government scholarship in 1961-62. His student years forged his artistic career, in which he acquired both painting and printmaking techniques. He has an inborn aptitude exploring new horizons, loving very much to involve himself in the trial-and-error process in order to acquire a new experience far away from conventional methods and process. So we find him, around 1956, coming to terms with his instinct for two-dimensional design. He used collage in a particular way, sticking pieces of plywood, metals scrap or layers of sand on the surface of his paintings. During this period, which lasted till the early 60s, Bhatt took to multi-media and mixed media techniques. He often used these extraordinary techniques to create assorted kinds of surfaces. His method varies from a painstaking and deliberate covering of his picture
surfaces, using different kinds of materials; one to enrich on the other. This process enabled him to achieve strange and varied surfaces by accident; the results of combining both the attitudes in a work are fascinating. Unthinkable surfaces turn out and mysteriously strange images emerge giving his collages a richness of content. "In them there is also an interesting intermingling of abstract adjustments with symbolic elements."

Let us have a look at his mixed media print of 1963 'A Patch of Blue.' This work is a specimen of his experimental multi-media work. In this year, Bhatt also executed another experimental work titled 'Landscape,' using sand, hessian, jute, etc., with oil paint on board. Talking about his multi-media artwork may lead us to his 'Landscape' and his 'Persistence' – 1964, which are abstract multi-media paintings. The colours used are very simple such as dark greys and warm silvers with an emphasized textured quality all over the picture. From 1964 onwards, the entire range of Bhatt's work shows meticulous attempts to compress the experience of a sophisticated, urbane and self-conscious artist into the flattened space created by those, who paint, weave and embroider anecdotes from their lives, or those of their gods, using signs, or symbols, or even graphic inscriptions for brevity and communication. Needing the inflections of a modern terminology, he has looked at American graphic design and printmaking for motifs to contain the culture of urban living. Through the conduit of design the folk idiom gets translated into a graphic Esperanto. It is interesting to see Bhatt combining his unique pictorial sensibility with printmaking. As a result, his prints virtually give a more significant vantage to his language as an artist than his paintings. Bhatt and the rest of the Indian artists were to forge an Indian image. Some of them were under the impact of the market requirements. The audiences demanded an indigenous identity. However, for Bhatt, this factor did not mean much. He never looked at the market requirements nor did he give in to the demands of the art lover.

Bhatt was impressed by the outstanding promises of the 'Group 1890,' which declared highly sophisticated slogans that are just like a swollen decorated balloon, having a short time to exist before it comes to blow-out and vanish. To my mind, these grouping theories and upside-down manifestos mixed with dreamy expectations are just a big joke. Illustrating this fact is not needed, so let us turn to another page, in order to approach the core of Bhatt's characteristic qualities. Seeking such kind of knowledge, let us get closer to Ratan Parimoo, who is constantly in Baroda from the early 1950s and has ample insight about all
the events and activities, which took place during these decades. In fact, he himself is an event-maker. In the following study, he keenly reveals some significant aspects of Bhatt’s prints; “The fine craftsmanship found in his paintings is revealed in his etchings too, where line and contour form the basis of delineation combined with textural and relief effects that are peculiar to the print process. In them, therefore, the quality of illustration is uppermost. Thus, his prints are not merely coloured textured surfaces, into which many of the etchings somehow seem to fall, but have an underlying meaning. Meticulously planned and carefully printed, they are conceived in terms of an integrated whole as design and image, in which the diagram and the symbol play interchanging roles.”

Between 1964-66, Bhatt got the Fulbright Scholarship to study at the Pratt Institute in New York. There, he had the advantage of high technical know-how in printmaking processes. He had the experience of new processes. Besides, his inborn meticulousness found ample opportunities for development. Bhatt loved to go for metal plates; may be for their variations and other qualities that are not available in some other processes such as lithography. In fact, lithography is a chemical process and has a definite disadvantage - all has to depend on definite rules. It was not as manoeuvrable as etching while processing, while in intaglio, he could control the progress step by step. He could command this process as suited to his temperament: “For him something in the etching technique is a little like painting, for etching may have some special advantages. Etching requires patience, slow work, manipulation and a step by step process, and yet this quality appealed to him for he could print each step of the process and keep a record. Changes took place on the plate or on the colour application, but he could keep track of all the nuances by printing and recording all he wanted, as in painting, where the surface of the canvas changes visually with each coat of paint. Etching enabled him to record every tiny step, so a sequence could be created and everything could be observed. This facilitated the preservation of each stage and the evolving of innumerable variations.”

In Bhatt’s work, we can see the use of two languages, one evolved from his familiarity with the folk-art of his state, and another from his camera. In fact, with the help of his camera, he recorded the numerous folk art patterns and designs. At the same time to reflect on towns and villages while travelling through villages, he began to take photographs of interesting incidents and places. Along with his keen eye for design and episode, lies his
intrigue for the mathematical world of numbers. Equation and precision that have often unconsciously crept onto him enhance the formal quality to a high degree as seen in his work. By this time of the late 60s, he was not relying much on the help of his camera. However, Bhatt has the necessary qualities for printmaking precision, a steady hand, accuracy, clarity and neatness. His work has a certain indefinable crispness so essential to an impressive print. His prints are also marked by a variety of themes - expanding in both abstract and figurative imagery. His images and visuals are inspired by the deeply rooted traditional past and bound in some typical favourite motifs such as Sathiya, rangoli, figures of birds, insects, animals, foot and hand impressions, heads, sun and moon images. They are further embellished by scribbled nomenclatures, pithy sayings and remarks.

Although Bhatt's major works are done in the decades of 1960s and 1975s, his place in the printmaking field is firmly etched and perhaps his reviewed interpretations in different kinds of mediums led him to explore further the possibilities in printmaking. His experimental nature has led him not only to explore the various techniques applicable in this field but also explore the various materials available in the realm of the art of prints. As an experimentalist, Bhatt uses a combination of various techniques in making the plate. He does not restrict himself to conventional rectangular or square formats, but often cuts the plate along the contour lines of the main motifs. He uses folk motifs and scripts in creating his image, which sometimes, have almost an iconic feeling, sometimes the images are decorative, certain intellectual ideas or they are tricky compositions which may be seen as puns. All these representations executed are examples of highly meticulous handling of printmaking tools and we observe that his prints of this period had acquired some characteristics of paintings. Besides his prints in fact, are almost a continuation of his painting. He bear the incorporate symbols, as in 'Icon' 1965, and in his print series 'Under the Sun.'

In this period, he gradually increased the signs, symbols, motifs and patterns to reinforce the very insignificance of their pressure. They remained purely to enhance the formal quality of the design, at other times, the entire creation becomes a pun. Meanwhile, he came to observe that the symbols could be used as powerful indicators and they could be used in different ways to lead the viewer to something unexpected or to arrive at some pleasant surprise, when he would discover that he is seeing something new, amazing and
tricky. Bhatt likes to play with symbols showing nicely his intellectual approach to a part of the art of prints. The viewer will be intrigued by many intricate details and he will not be able to know whether the artist has intended them as a pun or to make a significant remark, but surely he will know that he has been pulled into Bhatt’s tricky game, sharing with the artist some joyful smiles as well.

With the help of the new etching facilities, a great deal of activity started. The etching section began to acquire major significance in the graphic department. By this time, Bhatt had developed a repertoire of images to juggle and juxtapose for expression with a range of graphic possibilities. However, the most significant colour print of Bhatt in this year of 1966, is his ‘Lost Pundit’ showing a priest with a big owl dominating his head. This wonderful intaglio evoked interest abroad. It was an advanced etching, showing the outstanding mastery. It proudly matches the best of the world standard in creative printmaking. By this time, Bhatt had already set up the etching press in the department of graphics. From then onwards, he became one of the finest etchers of India till today, mastering the core of printmaking know-how and techniques in its entire complex processes and materials. We can consider ‘The Lost Pundit’ as a perfect example conveying the characteristic quality of Bhatt’s printmaking techniques. Let us bring this outstanding etching on to focus to reveal some of its special qualities. Here, we see the boldness of the enigmatic composition, the lovely musical lines constantly whispering to flatter the viewer’s eyes. Each portion shows an alert stance from a group doing recitation. It also reveals a particular quality and projects that kind of captivating appeal. Let us try to capture some of these ritual and magical rays and enjoy looking at these beams of colourful lights. Here is the truly masterpeace, the matchless one.

But what about that strange looking, extra-large menacing owl; look at its red, big and enigmatic eyes, what kind of mysterious gaze these suggestive eyes want to convey? There are no hints to reveal this secret. Showing the owl from the side position may reveal many of its specific decorated areas and helps us to pick up different kinds of religious, political symbols and emblems for Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jewish and even communists as well. In such symbols concerning the decorative folk motifs combined with some Indian calligraphy, we can see also some arrows, suggestive signs and indications enhanced by different gestures and colours. Here are the combinations of dominant yellow that spreads all over the
foreground; enhanced by some lovely white portions or dotted areas. The picture contains only the upper part of the Pundit's face. The expression revealed by this strange looking and decorated face with these wide, clever, suspicious eyes and the long pointed brows. In fact, the whole bold era of the plane foreground is attractive and enhanced by rich and lovely deep and rich variation of warm brown colour. It is illuminating to mention here this brief phrase; "Though we may have lost the 'Pundit,' we have gained his outstanding print for good, "We should not forget the owl intimidates the head of our 'Pundit.' Bhatt, here, might be completely involved in the political sector, or let us say, he opposes all these false allegations and wants to be free, far away from any religious, political or social impact. He is his own master.

Bhatt exhibited his work extensively in the second half of the 60s, immediately upon his return from Pratt Institute, New York. This was one of his most prolific periods. He was among the pioneering forces to advocate printmaking as a serious art form not only in the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, but also among Indian artists all over the country, as well as in the sophisticated people, who deeply appreciate and love art works. On the other hand, we find that his prints fascinate the lay public as well. However, let us know more about his course abroad. "His experience at the 'Tamarind Workshop,' 1965-66, where he had learnt the intricacies of intaglio printing was very valuable. It seemed to answer the needs of his developing interest, besides giving him pleasure in the myriad tricks to harness accidental effects and gain control over the unexpected. Knowing they would have problems in printing his elaborate plates in India, he made drawings of the presses at the Tamarind Workshop."

When returned to Baroda, Bhatt's mechanic friend Bharat Patel worked on the drawings, thus the etching press got made. For etching process, they got tools from the nearest markets.

Bhatt likes to maintain a satirical attitude and found it very appropriate for his printmaking career, so he had high motivation for this kind of involvement. He also started to use some particular elements differently, for instance, he came to the realm of calligraphy and approached its elements from new angles and for new purposes to attain some sort of fulfillment and satisfaction. This attitude may be considered as another point of departure for Bhatt. In some cases, he used a few letters or sentences to fill space and to add further dimensions by using its particular characteristics and forms as design elements. Here, we may see a kind of playful arrangement and a few illusory indicators and gestures combining
with special artistic qualities such as the beauty of the outlines and the lovely contours. Sometimes he used to depict it in a leaf form. In fact, Bhatt always achieved rich images with interesting textures and new outlook, and sometimes with interesting puns such as DOG written on the plate to get the reverse GOD in the final print. The striking images seem to be his enjoyable performance and his professional recital as well. However, in all these projections, Bhatt is very keen to play his own game and while he is doing so, he will never compromise. He later explored this attitude and has had achieved deeper involvement. Bhatt was executing these puns and satirical themes by using etching and silkscreen process. So it is worthwhile to have a look at the earlier silkscreen prints, which were tried out experimentally for the magazine 'Kshitij' for its cover, long before the medium was introduced at the Faculty or before Subramanyan made his own celebrated books for children in silkscreen.

It was around the late sixties, when Bhatt was spending a summer in Bombay, he picked up the technique from a relative’s commercial screen-printing concern. When he returned, the artists circle at Baroda pooled it’s know-how to set up a silkscreen unit. Besides Jyoti Bhatt, it was Feroze Katpitia, V.S. Patel, Vinodray Patel, along with the younger printmaker P.D. Dhumal, who worked out the nitty-gritty. From the rudimentary stencil techniques to the possibilities of tonal and colour gradations and photographic methods, silkscreen printing came a long way. Many young graduates from the Faculty of Fine Arts have since set up commercial silkscreen units; Dhumal being the first amongst them.

Bhatt believes that Indian printmakers are working against great odds. In the by gone days, printmakers were few and their needs were small and they could, to some extent count on imported material. But things are different now. "We have stopped importing goods, but our manufacturers import foreign technology and so we are limited in initiative. So we are poorer in both ways. The lack of initiative runs from the industrialist down to the handicraft man. Our hand-made paper industry should certainly be able to produce suitable paper for a printmaker, but they do not seem to care. They would rather produce craft or ornamental paper. But, nevertheless, I would not blame the quality of prints on these. One should be able to produce things of quality even from the humblest of materials."6

Though most of the Indian artists are open to new forms of expression, there still exists this inability to accept photography as a relevant medium. In such a situation, it is very
difficult for one to pursue photography for one’s graphic prints. But with Bhatt, it is the other way. There have been two significant exhibitions for representing photography as a fine art and also as a documentary art, both the exhibitions were held in Bombay. The first was about folk and traditional art-1967 and the second revealed a more characteristic aspect of Bhatt as an image-maker through the art of photography next to printmaking. Nilima Sheikh reveals here, in general, some of the articulate aspects and advanced characteristics concerning the technical improvements, which help to create an adequate momentum of printmaking techniques; “Narendra Mehta set up the photography section of the Department of Graphics. At the initiative of Bendre, Bhupendra Karia, a well-qualified printmaker and photographer, was appointed to the Faculty in the mid-sixties to update the department and bring it up to a professional level. Though he stayed for only two years, he added considerable sophistication to the techniques and concept of photography. In 1969, he joined younger teachers including Jeram Patel, Jyoti Bhatt, G.M. Sheikh, V.R. Patel for an exhibition in Bombay titled ‘Painters with Camera.’ It was a significant contribution to the acceptance of black and white photography as an expressive medium in India.”

Bhatt has blended themes of both the figurative and abstract. From this mixture he builds his own imagery. In fact, his imagery and figures do not play a traditional role, but add dimension to abstractness. His images and visuals are inspired by a deeply rooted and traditional past and bound in rangoli motifs - birds, animals and hand or foot impressions. During his years of teaching in the painting department - for more than 25 years - he helped to cultivate the right attitude among his students towards printmaking. This new medium became a challenge and a suitable field for experimentation, using the process of trial-and-error freely and independently. For this purpose, he has set up an evening workshop in the graphic department, where interested artists and other people could come and work. However, this evening workshop did not last for long due to a lot of complications. On the other hand, his teaching job has, in a way, made him more inclined towards the exploration of technical possibilities, utilizing the methods and materials used in printing industries. This he prefers to do with indigenous materials.

In fact, as an Indian artist devoting himself to teaching fine art techniques and aesthetics, he did his job with great love, maintaining a fatherly approach towards his students. He gave them all the secrets of printmaking and technical know-how and even
enlightened them with his own discoveries without expecting any benefit for himself. I admire this noble quality and appreciate this attitude, which is rare and extremely unique. To my mind, as a foreigner, this quality reveals one of the most important characteristics of Indians. Probing further, we also find that the students working together, hand in hand, with their hearts set on achieving their faculty's projects for the good of society. Love, work, dedication and also devotion blossom in all regions of the beloved India.

However, many Indian printmakers, probably due to their traditional ties and rigid beliefs, prefer to use simple tools that can be controlled manually. Others keep away from mechanical devices, because they are too complicated or expensive or too difficult to procure. But why should mechanical devices not be used to secure their aim and make the task easier? Why should they hesitate to use them? Bhatt points out; “In fact, all artists have used some tool or the other since the prehistoric times. Cameras, enlargers and other mechanical devices are only more advanced types of tools. Why should they not use them if they serve their purpose? It is immaterial to a printmaker whether a hand-roller or a mechanized roller inks his block as long as it fulfills the job. It is true that many printmakers prefer to use simple tools that they can control manually. Serigraphs, monochrome intaglios, lithographs can be done by a professional printer as adeptly as those made by an artist, sometimes the artisan does it better and in less time.”

Talking about professional artisans, it is worthwhile to mention one of them, viz., Magan S. Parmar. This innocent villager was known for his naive prints. He further obtained recognition and gained some notable rewards just a little before his untimely death. Magan was the genuine product of the rural life, sensitive and spontaneous, and successfully brought the spirit as well as the form of rural art straight into his outstanding prints. One should observe that there seemed to have been no obstacles to hinder this transit. Bhatt, at this time, was a keen observer of the prints of this spontaneous artisan, who worked in the department from around the mid-60s till he died of cancer in 1975. I think this printmaker significantly influenced Bhatt. However, when an artist such as Bhatt has this deep admiration for someone's work, he will not take it blindly. For Bhatt always approached such works with a professional attitude and gained inspiration from other artists, but always forging such influences according his own accent. However, there is evidence, which points out to some real elements, which are true, original and deeply rooted in the Indian soil. So let us have a
look at Bhatt's etching 'Tantrik Modern India,'*6 and also his acrylic on hard board 'A Page From My Sketchbook,' both of 1969*7 and at his interesting etching 'Self Portrait' 1970-71.*8 Let us now compare his particular elements, figures, trees, birds and human beings, with Magan's characteristically naive rendering of images and his freehand prints; simple yet deeply conveying the core of the rural atmosphere, original and effective. One of them is Magan's 'Untitled Lithos' *9 of around the late 60s.

It was in the year 1970, when Bhatt created four of his best prints done in etching, 'Faces,'*10 which acquired a tricky kind of optical illusion combined with an arabesque outlook. 'Dice,'*11 yet another geometrical composition built up by mixing four cubes with pieces of folk images shows the profiles of the cubes in different positions, leaving the dark surfaces to be spaced in different directions to portray the accidental destination of each piece of dice. Here, we can see the perfection of the linear quality and the innovative use of the traditional images that create a sort of coherent and concrete outlook. 'The Egg,' executed around this period, is one of his amazing intaglio prints produced by using metallic silver. This colour etching conveys the concept of the universe, depicted as a sea and four human beings in different positions, naked and standing or bending in horizontal position joining their hands to capture something unraveled yet. Different kinds of Western calligraphy is mixed in every way with strange birds, fish, snakes, scorpions, Hindi writing, leaves, numbers and hearts. This beautiful print is a part of a larger plate titled 'Brahmanda.' 'Pseudo-Tantrik Self Portrait' *6 is the title of the fourth etching, which is full of ancient Indian tantrik symbols and also containing different kinds of calligraphy. Regarding tantrik, Bhatt points out "After tantrik art was discovered, many Indian artists came to do very chaotic paintings and named it 'tantrik' Without understanding what is tantrik, you will not be able to achieve any worthwhile artwork. Using tantrik symbols without coherent and deep knowledge will not make the artwork to be tantrik, this will be only a sort of superficial projection lifeless and dull."

Bhatt believes that the use of the readymade image is also advisable when there is need to do so. It may be true that the use of photographic image cuts out the use of the hand and knowledge of drawing, etc., that goes with it. But finally the hand is also a kind of tool, Bhatt says, and it is the judgement that is supreme. K.G. Subramanyan has a very intellectual
point of view, which will help much in this context. "It is not difficult to visualize today's technological devices as being more complicated tools and tools as an extension of the hand or the hand itself a tool that is an extension of the mind. The point to ensure is that there is a connecting thread running through these controls and is watchful. I suppose that these days, when socio-psychologists categorize the television as an extension of the eye, the radio and phonograph as of the ear, and the telecommunication network, of the nervous system."9

It was in the early seventies, when Bhatt started getting deeply influenced by photographic imagery. He already did some experimental prints using these readymade pictures and photos, but his real obsession with this process came to be the goal of his prints after the mid-1970s. As an experimental master, he is always moving in a circle, so he often comes to use old techniques, especially the collage processes. But each time he handles the objects and materials differently as if he has been discovering some sort of a new medium. Though in some cases, Bhatt took to a few European styles because he was influenced by such methods and has been always forging these foreign styles according to his own way of image-making. However, Bhatt is much inspired by the folk embroidery of his native Saurashtra. Its stylized and simplified motifs in bright colours studded with pieces of mirrors do appear almost to have been stuck onto the flat plane of the cloth. By this time, Bhatt came to realize that the suitable process is to follow the 'Photo-gravure', the method practiced by Alfred-Steglitz and his 'photo secessionist' friends during the first quarter of this century. Yet all Bhatt's concentrated efforts to acquire the essential know how proved futile, and he was unable to achieve the required results. This method, while maintaining the photographic quality in these prints, would have allowed him the autograph control, which is necessary to satisfy his aesthetic and psychological needs. By the early seventies, the department comes to acquire all the branches of printmaking processes, such as woodcut, linocut, etching, lithography, silkscreen, etc. What is very important for Bhatt is to set a new trend by acquiring adequate facilities to use photographic images in printmaking processes.

By this time, Bhatt started playing a significant role in his special game 'photography.' In fact, this medium has an ample scope for innovative experimental processes. He believes that the photographic process demands many of the qualities that are required in printmaking. Due to his continuous experimental processes, he came to invent some sort of an extraordinary language of image making and this is what makes his prints acquire an
amazing new look. In fact, Bhatt has contributed enormously to the graphics department. Many printmakers of the new generation have been influenced by his powerful handling of the materials of printmaking and his innovative approach to all the different processes of printmaking techniques and also by the new advanced looks of his pictures. For these reasons, we can consider him as a trendsetter in the new processes of printmaking. Bhatt is still somehow active in printmaking, but according to his own concept and concern. In fact, Bhatt is one of those printmakers, who though having limited facilities in printmaking equipment and materials, still creates prints, which remain purely to enhance the formal quality of design, the meticulously planned composition with its myriad images arranged to create a symmetrical balance. Through years of continuous efforts, his prints acquired the status of novel aspects and intellectual representation.

It was 1970, when Bhatt designed a book for the Baroda Citizens Council to illustrate flies as a menace. The study of this insignificant creature led to a number of prints of topical interest. The curious status that this creature began to acquire is seen in his print line, the 'face' and 'flies,' where two symbols created by the artist begin to interact and operate intriguing the spectator to interpret several meanings. In his colour etching 'Blue Fly,' 1970 and some other prints of this period, he generally prefers a symmetrical arrangement of shapes and forms. Naina Dalai, an eminent printmaker of Baroda, highlights Bhatt's print and reveals some of his significant aspects; "A facial profile is an obsessive motif of his compositions. Both versions of 'Flies' remind us of the traditional 'Nari-Kunjura' image, in which several female figures merge to form the image of an elephant. He also juxtaposes various forms of the Devnagri script against Roman alphabet. These juxtapositions not only harmonize with the shapes of images, but sometimes serve as humorous labels for them too." Bhatt's mixed intaglio 'Flies' 1971, is apparently an intended satire on certain aspects, but slightly blended from tantric, erotic and other modern trends in Indian paintings. It is a fact that satire has a place in all fields of human activity as a corrective force calculated to bring about sanity and reason. Where wild superficial or irrational actions by people tend to distort the vision of society, the satirist can only descend to the level of a cynic and survey with distrust the struggles of his fellow men. Bhatt may have missed the bright moments amidst the many seemingly so-called failures and achievements.
In the early 1970s, Josef James points out, "Jyoti Bhatt is a virtuoso, whose picture, whether painting or graphics, have the stamp of technical accomplishment of immense variety. His abstract in oils and in Indian folk manner done a few years ago and the meticulously precise early pictures in the sophisticated old Indian techniques, all proclaim his great versatility and aptitude to make the most of any material he chooses to use. This in itself is a great quality, which may some day lead him on to substantial work and positive contribution to contemporary art."\textsuperscript{11}

Before we turn to his third phase, let us say, after this 'Fly,' he turned to other themes such as the goddess 'Devi,' etching, 1971.\textsuperscript{14} Bhatt achieved this colour intaglio in a graphic workshop held in Delhi. This print was to be one of the cleverest puns, articulating the intentions of the artist and intriguing the viewer in its utmost capacity. It was this year or even a little before Bhatt started experimenting with optical illusions, geometrical shapes and ruled straight lines, which may be suitable for an architectural drawing or an articulate engineer. Bhatt could have easily taken up either career. These qualities are not enough to describe a genius like Bhatt, who also creates a harmonious blend of folk and Tantric art\textsuperscript{13} overlapping with a scientific approach. His artistic tools and element are often enveloped by social intimation and showed deep understanding of Indian heritage.

The apparent décorativeness of his works is a strategic deception. In this regard, it is better to quote the interpretation by Shivaji Panikkar, "The composite and hybrid character of the imagery, the very complexity in reading the formal extravaganza and its redundancy make sense only after getting enticed into the sheer visual details. By the early 1970s, Bhatt had developed a repertoire of images to juggle with and juxtapose an anonymous human profile in stencil silhouette, used single or in multiple combinations - a photographic peacock frame within a silhouetted human head,\textsuperscript{15} the jigsaw puzzle like trick cubes projecting and receding, a magnified house-fly enclosed with multiple copulating human figures, a yantra, a naga-lokam, a weathercock, human limbs in parts, a bow-and- arrow, etc."\textsuperscript{12} Some of these stock imagery combined with some of the motifs are deliberately literal. Panikkar reveals some of these symbols and indication, "Such as the sign of heart symbolizing love or a woman with a parrot suggesting erotic love. Words in Gujarati, English and Hindi, directly bears up on the rhetoric intentions." The series of displacements of his elements have been with the lifting of the images from the original context and relocating them in absolutely new
and unexpected contexts. Such process will lend the artist to effect multiple meanings and polyvalent discourses.

Bhatt exhibited his work widely in India and abroad, such as New Jersey, New York and West Germany. He took part in group-shows in Paris, Sao Paulo, Switzerland, Philippines, Poland, Japan, Yugoslavia, Germany, Cuba, Britain and Holland. He also joined camps and workshops at New Delhi, Calcutta, Ahmedabad, and Aurangabad and of course, Baroda. We have already mentioned that while Bhatt was a student of Fine Arts, he won a prestigious prize. Later on he developed a habit to be a regular prize-collector. In fact, he did not run after it, while the prizes themselves searched for such an eminent printmaker for their destination. He won numerous prestigious awards in India and abroad, and also executed some commissions in India and abroad. So we can find his works in the collection of several galleries and other well-known institutions in different parts of India and some important countries, both in the East and West.

Let us shift from the theme of prizes to the theme of war. It was in the year 1971, when Bangladesh was struggling for liberation. Bhatt quickly made linocut prints, which may be considered as a statement on the brutality of war. It is his picture 'Victims of the War,'*20 that conveys the message. Bhatt did this wonderful black and white print for Baroda's famous magazine for fine arts 'Vrishchik.' Interestingly, Bhatt also did some striking lithoprints in the year 1973. In one of these prints titled 'A Lithograph,'*25 we observe different kinds of tantrik symbols and geometrical units combined with meaningful shapes. Devnagri calligraphy also can be seen in different places. Strange and ferocious snakes, beasts and ugly birds have been involved in a brutal attack against the human beings. Other symbols have been spread all over the composition to enrich the atmosphere or it might have been done only to enhance the meaning.

Bhatt Holding up His Camera

Though photography demands many of the printmaking qualities, it cannot be considered as a real printmaking by itself. But Bhatt has strangely a different point of view. He almost says photography in some cases is in an actual printmaking. This particular belief creates powerful motivation towards this medium. He is fascinated by photography. This attitude moulded him into a total artist combining the totality of his talents. In these early years of the 1970s, Bhatt began experimenting with silkscreen prints using the photographic
images starting with his 'heads' series. He did good number of prints using the face as a
Trotagonist'. The active nerve centre of all that has created, and it is also among the first to
become the target of the artist. Let us reveal more about this interesting process. Bhatt loves
to be involved by continuous experimental atmosphere. He might take up a motif, say, a
human head and explore its possibilities by placing in different angles, he then projects
different shades of tones and some simple colours and starts to juxtapose, combines it to form
a new design. By this processes, he could pick-up hundreds of variations and he will be able
to use them aesthetically by select only the pleasant ones, which serve his intention or help
him to project his inner idea.

"Having been familiar with the tradition of diptych and triptych paintings, it was a
natural step for me to use two or more images together. By printing them side by side, these
images were strengthened; still containing their originally suggested meaning, the placement
of the images next to each other further expanded their meaning. And though each remains
an independent image, combined, they become and function as a whole image. However, in
this process, there is a total lack of constructive criticism or experienced guidance available.
On the other hand, the medium itself can be very taxing and laborious." Says Bhatt, in fact,
this medium requires considerable amount of experimentation based on trial and error in
order to acquire the basic technical ability and skill. This proves often to be very time
consuming and can discourage one, for, most photographic materials also prove to be far
more expensive and difficult to come by in relation to the ones used in other graphic media.

Bhatt found in screen printing process, the suitable medium to execute his playing
with photographic images. He demands to create some kind of paradox, he may portray an
image that seems to say something opposite to common sense or truth, but, which may
contain a truth. This intellectual approach to this printmaking career of the 1970s is a weapon
of two edges. To reveal this attitude, let us say in brief: when an artist relies so much on this
tricky elements and pun depictions in his prints and starts playing with the viewer something
like hide-and-seek games or leading him always to search for the meaning or the pun. In this
case, the artist will put an unwarranted load on his picture asking it to reveal its story; not its
aesthetic quality. To my mind, it is a sort of cartooning the images. But in fact, Bhatt always
does it in a highly intellectual manner. However, this does not mean that it is healthy to do
so, because slowly and slowly this attitude leads to project languorous pictures similar to

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those enjoyable and entertaining depictions of some street-artists. However, Bhatt has had the intellectual ways to avoid this destination by creating paradoxes of puns that capture our interest and arouse our admiration. So, let us enjoy whatever he has done. Let us also hope, he would be able to quit this game soon.

Though we might misunderstand Bhatt’s intention through his work, we at least respect his power of projecting his mind and his progressive steps seeking to reach new horizons and give impetus to the contemporary Indian printmaking to enter the coming century. It is better to look at the unique perfection of his prints and the intellectual and high quality of approach to his social and even political criticism through his works, which also bring to focus the major odds of urban life that might be revealed in his further works.

We need to go little further with Bhatt to know about his concepts about photography as a new graphic medium believing that the facility of photographic processes is an extension of the plate graphics. However, it is difficult for me and may be for many others to accept photography as an actual printmaking. Regardless of the idea that says that photography, like printmaking, demands many of the printmaking qualities, “My teaching job in an art institution, has in a way, made me more inclined towards the exploration of technical possibilities, utilizing the methods and materials used in printing industries. This I prefer to do with indigenous materials.”

In fact, we should always notice that the interaction, involvement of the group and the co-operative atmosphere of working inside the studios of the graphic departments was and still of great value and benefited not only the students, but their instructors as well. I think, Bhatt grasps a lot of tiny ideas, assemble them together, forge them, press them into his own blockmaker and afterwards brings it to the light and then puts his signature. Bhatt proved that now-a-days he could not achieve the quality of the prints similar to those he had done in his sixties and the seventies. And one more thing; as time passes by, Bhatt gets into a more intimate contact with his obsession with photography. What is strange in this situation, is the new concept that makes Bhatt replace camera shooting by his sketchbook. From now onwards, it becomes difficult to go after his graphic works. However, when Bhatt is talking on this issue, he brings very good examples and holds intellectual comparisons that could convince any one. Talking to such an eminent artist is always a pretty rewarding experience and this is a very good virtue that may be added to his immense credit. This man has an
intellectual and warm approach. “One can not deny the autograph images as another up-to-date graphic medium of advanced types of tools. Why should the artist not use them if they serve his purpose? It is immaterial to a printmaker, whether a hand-roller or a mechanized roller inks his block, as long as it does the job as per his requirement. The use of ready made images, too, is as valid, in my opinion, as the use of autograph images, even in traditional art we can see the use of standard images chosen from iconography hand books. They too are ready-made of a kind.”

Bhatt has a very independent attitude for his own work. He has not followed any of those criteria, such as investment aspects connected with printmaking, as far as communication with art galleries and collectors is concerned, because in India, not many even understand the difference between a graphic print and other work done on paper. “Usually I take several proofs while working on my plates before I am satisfied with the image. Generally I do not make editions after that stage as I find printing of edition a little too mechanical and boring.” He however loves to participate in printmaking workshops and camps here or there, but even this little number came to decrease, more due to one particular reason that disabled him to retrieve his past handcraftsmanship, that is what may be called ‘accidental psychical disability,’ which afflicted him in the early seventies. This particular adversity badly affected his career and deeply hurt him. One of Bhatt’s right hand fingers sustained a fracture and never recovered. For more than two years, Bhatt could not use his right hand for anything related to printmaking. Few years later, he started getting somewhat a little ability, but never like in the past days. Those were the days, he had to succumb to the situation that made him keep changing his tools and materials to surmount his permanent disability and continue with the help of camera perfectly through his printmaking career. From now on he relies much on his photographs.

Farewell, to all those achievements and glorious years. That is why Bhatt considered his camera as his favorite sketch-book and starts to explain the virtue of his new concept of this magical camera, which is, for him, more true and adequate, much precise and flattering. I will not buy this easily. I will not even agree with these claims considering camera as a sketchbook. We can not even hold any kind of comparison between them. Through a sketch-pen you project what you see and feel. By your inner eye, while commanding the camera, demanding some kind of expressive scene or object, you have to return to the rules of the
lens, seeking its potential power and take care of all its demands. You are not free to achieve and fulfil the ultimate. I will agree with Bhatt considering his camera as a saviour. But it seems to me that he rather replaced his disabled hand with the camera, and tried to forget all about his glorious days and his matchless achievements. Now onwards, this subsidiary hand will also reveal as to why Bhatt has a great obsession with photographic imagery and technique as a sort of consolation and compensation to give him a kind of self-recovery and sustain hope, although real fulfillment is out of his reach. This will make him as an outsider, what will he do? He looked around him, then fled away towards his peaceful niche, carefully holding his camera and standing alert to make some stills from his milieu or the rural and folk life in order to capture some wall paintings. Till this date Bhatt did not completely abandon his graphic art, it becomes less, but carrying the maximum of qualities and personal accent such as his precise lines, selected elements, tools, and masterly drawing on plates, but he often prefers the screen-printing process. In fact, his prints by this time come to be rare and his glorious days became a part of history.

By this time of the late 1970s, we find it difficult to talk about Bhatt's artistic activities without considering the dominant power of his camera on his artistic career. However, Bhatt believes that the difference between conventional printmaking and the photographic projection will surely be minimized in the very near future due to the ample and widespread use of progressive improvements and further advanced discoveries in the field of computerized photography and compugraphic processes that are all the products of computer science and advanced technology, and also due to this explosion of knowledge, communication and internet. All that I have tried to do in the last three decades has been to document as much as I could within the limits of available resources. I have been encouraged by distinguished photographers like Raghu Rai and the late Kishor Parekh, and some other eminent artists. Bhatt also believes that with a camera, one can freeze a decisive moment, or even a fraction of a moment, one that embodies the quintessence of a constantly fluid situation. This is what distinguishes it from painting. By and large, his approach to a subject has been similar to the artist's approach to a still life or a landscape. He does not miss the opportunity to synthesize human figures with the static background that show painted or drawn images on walls or floors. We can refer here to his mixed intaglio 'The Wall' 1990 and also to his earlier mixed intaglio of 1978, titled 'Kolams and Symbols.'
Sometimes, Bhatt practices his printmaking career as a hobby such as the theme of his recent prints ‘The Dentist’s Chart’ series-1996. He executed only one screen print concerning this series and may be he left the rest for the day to come. In fact, we can not find any further prints done during the year 1997-98. However, let us go through some of his viewpoints. In fact, Bhatt has written in detail about the techniques of printmaking, its complexities and its variations to suit individual pursuits. He once said, “I think and realize that since machines are here to stay and we have to live with them, why not utilize them to suit our purposes.”

Bhatt draws our attention to some further aspects. He explained how the situation now is quite relaxed for the graphic print that incorporated a photographic image or technique; “Many printmakers have started using not only photographic images, but also photographic and compugraphic techniques used commonly in printing industries. The number of prints made in similar manner, i.e., photogravure, images with halftone and quarter-tone dotted surfaces, photo-offset lithoplates, etc., is increasing now in international print-biennials and triennials. Images created with help of camera, enlarger, computer’s advanced facilities, scanner, etc. are now often used for making graphic art in intaglio, relief, stencil and lithographic processes. But, whatever be the method adopted by contemporary printmakers, they are in full control of all the steps from A to Z involved in that.”


Bhatt says, “What then often results is that there is the danger of those involved in such medium to be content with whatever they have arrived at, thereby not really pushing the possibilities of this medium to its maximum. One fervently hopes that with the new awareness towards photography, a lot of these problems will be tackled and overcome with time. A day hopefully shall arrive, when in India too, the Bauhaus artist Moholy Nagy’s famous quote made half a century ago becomes a reality, “...Anyone not able to use a camera will be considered an illiterate of tomorrow.” Bhatt successfully went beyond the conventional tradition to create a new visual vocabulary of contemporary abstract design. However, Bhatt is recognized as one of India’s major authorities on folk design; his
wonderful photos on the traditional art and designs of rural India are highly appreciated and used in many documentary researches.

In this section, we highlighted Bhatt as the architect of Baroda’s printmaking. But, this eminent printmaker reached the dead-end of his printmaking career by converting all about printmaking technique to the realm of photography. We have already discussed about his new destination. In this regard, we have to search for something to enhance our chapter, giving it a new blood and some sort of excitement, so I come to the idea as to why not highlight one of the best etchers in the country, but under one condition. The selected etcher should be one of the best products of Baroda. When I examine the work of several printmakers, whom I met during my research trips to the major printmaking centres of the country; I came through the names of Gouri Shanker, D. Devraj, D.L.N. Reddy, Prayag Jha, Dattatraya Apte, Ajit Dubey, Siddharth Gosh and Laxma Goud, to name a few. We will talk briefly on Devraj and D.L.N. Reddy and then proceed to make an analytical study on the prints of Laxma Goud.

D. Devraj,*22 D.L.N. Reddy and Gouri Shanker*23 came from Hyderabad during the late 60s and early 70s to study printmaking in Baroda. They have since popularized it elsewhere in India, Devraj has been a veritable one-man printmaking movement in so far as setting up presses and printmaking studios is concerned: in Bharat Bhavan at Bhopal, Garhi Studios at Delhi and the regional centres of Lalit Kala Akademi – to name a few. His early experiments with mezzotint have brought now frequently used effects into the Indian printmaker’s bag of tricks. D.L.N. Reddy has a special feel for whichever graphic medium he chooses and makes him elicit the immediate responsive qualities unique to the medium. Reddy made emotive graphic images during his stay in Baroda,*24 notably of himself as a protagonist in the Residency Bungalow. We do not have much to talk about Gouri Shanker, yet, he is also an active painter-printmaker.

It was Laxma Goud, who brought the quest for authentic image right into the gamut of printmaking. Laxma had worked at Baroda. He had come from Hyderabad to study mural design from Subramanyan between 1963 and 1965. His livewire, irrepressible personality and exceptionally skilled pair of hands made him a presence to reckon with. “Laxma made the most of his training under Subramanyan. He learnt from him to look around himself for a
perception of his identity. The search took him to his roots, to his village in Andhra and to the images of his adolescence pervaded by pubescent sexuality. He was attracted to the sexual iconization of Souza and to Husain’s potent brushwork and his energy. This was when he encountered the work of Jeram Patel, who did some black and white images of obsessive sexual phantasmagoria in the late 60s and the early 70s. Energy was identified as phallic puissance.”

In fact, going through Laxma’s striking etchings, for us, should be a step ahead and such discourse should pave to enrich this chapter. This approach will portray the significant role of Baroda as a producer of the best printmakers in the country. So, let us highlight Laxma Goud as an exceptional product of Baroda, through our coming section.

LAXMA GOUD

The Exceptional Product of Baroda

Laxma Goud is one of India’s leading printmakers. He has been influenced by the sixteenth and seventeenth century miniature paintings that came from various places in India and usually depicted court figures or religious figures in lush landscape settings. The figures in these miniatures illustrated some narrative and were often done to accompany books; those depicted, therefore, become as actors in drama, whether historical, romantic, legendary or religious. Laxma was widely influenced by theatre and the Indian village. Let us see how Laxma built up his printmaking career. In 1963, Laxma Goud was a student in the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda. There he improved his competence as a draughtsman and as an exceptional etcher. One day his teacher K.G. Subramanyan asked him bluntly, “What will you paint or etch to establish your identity through your work?” Laxma said, “I began to understand that if I wanted to become a real artist, I had to create something not interchangeable, something reflecting my inner self, my very personal experiences and imagination.”

After Laxma came home in 1966, he drew from all the sources that he came across during the years he spent in Baroda and plugged them into the dreams and nightmares of adolescent sexuality, into the landscape, animals and persona of his boyhood days. Nilima Sheikh has observed, “He permeated his drawings with surreal libidinous inhabitants and a throbbing expressionist anguish, but an increasing interest in cultural specificity and in
graphic delineation made him look elsewhere for linguistic resource. In this invention of language, an outcome of a search for identity, for the authentic image, the medium of intaglio played a contributory, even formative role. Laxma has been a printmaker of exceptional significance because his medium was integral to the quest of his art. In spite of or perhaps because of his excellent technical command, he wore technique lightly."

It was really after Laxma had left Baroda that he began to discover his idiom as well as his medium, intaglio. Intense images from the early seventies remain deeply impressed on the mind. Landscapes sprout phallic mounds and fecund arbors in the deep of the night, prehistoric animals watch expectantly and womb-like niches glow with desirous eyes and bulbous breasts. Women, always desirable, might grow wings of trees instead of arms to vanish like apparitions, or turn towards eroticized bestial creatures waiting in the wings. Monster birds with watchful eyes or prehistoric lizards with phallic head and gesturing, beckoning hands. Laxma’s people are the symbolic contemporary Indian, who has become alienated from nature and the transactional fecundity of all creative forces. While nature continues on its fertile and productive course, these humans seem to have stopped in the middle of some actions as though they were trying to remember why they want to talk about sex, there are beautiful songs and they are very open about it... Copulating animals live where the human beings do and they are very open about it. It is not hidden and treated cynically away from view of the public. His early etchings expressively portray such sexual themes.

Laxma approaches sexual theme in a slightly different way. One can see that while his figures stand naked amidst the profusion of nature, they seem sterile and barren. To reveal the situation of those figures that are staring into space like actors, seemingly having forgotten their own entities. However, in order to understand his prints of the early 70s, we need to examine these etchings carefully to pick up his individual characteristics and his intellectual, original and genuine qualities; be it a subject matter or his outstanding craftsmanship. I refer here to his interesting etchings and aquatint of 1971. Getting after his sexual themes, we observe that “the ‘pure,’ unpolluted sex appealed to him more than the complex psychological relationship between the sexes in the urban middle class. The instinctive discovery of own erotic sensibility triggered his imagination, stirring his animus into action. It also gave him glint of a unique expression he was seeking. The erotic...
impulse that had remained suppressed or dormant through years of urbanization, now served as a nerve through which he viewed the world and touched his roots.

Laxma believes that he does not aim at the changing society. He thinks an artist has to follow his own aims, otherwise he cannot create art. He does not just follow the inspirations of his fantasy. He deliberately tries to go deeper into the object, to X-ray it to show the very essence of it and its relations to other objects. He is convinced that this and nothing else was his duty as an artist. Back to a little more about sexuality: in the Western conviction or in the world of daily erotic directness, one is free to associate all forms of organic growth and objective power with the erotic, for each is equally wonderful and equally banal. Laxma entwines figures with their ornaments, as if they are stitched from the same cloth and these with phallic trees, plants and animals. Figures, ornaments, trees, and stones are clumped together as if they were tiffs of landscape. The village is nature, always in the throes of entropy. Within its natural cycles it discards nothing. The earlier pencil drawings of several objects and a rope, turns into later drawing of several objects in which these objects become part of the larger landscape. These figures are never free of blemishes. They can suffer, yet they are not in the end either alienated or afraid, since they are unashamed and unconcealing.

Laxma delves into the realm of subconscious, where the sub-conscious transcends almost into an animal instinct. He has got the guts to translate this into pictorial imagery and has done it wonderfully well. He creates his imagery through charged horses or bulls, animalized human forms or humanized animals. Even the clouds and trees, take human and gruesome shapes. For the pictorial composition, he prefers the landscape as the appropriate vehicle for his expression. The large black cloud with beasts and strange creatures and sub-human figures that loom large with devilish cruelty over a bizarre landscape. However, Laxma started to modify his sexual delineations and erotic subjects by periodically infusing into his works the comic and the grotesque. To my mind, he did not distance himself from his erotic themes. Now we see man and woman clothed in their primordial instincts and the flora and fauna. Though such animals, birds, plants, trees and jungles that he has portrayed do not exist in nature as created by God, he wanted to transplant them to reorganize them into his pictorial space.
Nikki T. Seth remarks on some of his particular themes, "Laxma’s desire rendered pathetic by his ageing physique and tentatively outstretched figures. Or a dark reptilian forms lovers’ passion with suppressed guilt. Man and beast mingle and coalesce into quasi-mythological creatures, phalluses*12*13 sprout into groves of stocky trees and the flotsam and jetsam of rural living not only surrounds, but actually invades the flesh of his villagers." One can observe some of the best erotic artworks on hyperbolic humour by blowing up sexual organs out of proportion, adding to the act, a touch of comic. The tense gravity of sexual intercourse is relieved in the Japanese woodcuts, when the mates are found fumbling for each other’s body entangled in a maze of drapery. Laxma also has a touch of satirical humour. This attitude is probably intended to mock at pretence and conformity.*16

Laxma exposed himself to a lot of efforts and research concerning his deep involvement in the rural sexual themes. By the mid-70s, we feel that he became the master of his game. Generally speaking, his sexual attitude that conveys some kind of sexual exposure,*18 is coupled with a feeling of assault, suggestive and animalistic. A multi-phallic apportionment of a winged female with vaginal eye*9 and the real set in the phallus’ heads,*13 a buxom female startled by an erupting phallus in the field, while beasts are copulating*12 in the hills, a bull accosting a nude woman beside a lamp post. The dramatic tableau are rendered in strong contrast of dark and white, in varying grades of aquatint, the sexualized form of nature – vegetation and the environment – assumes phantasmagorical proportions, a quaint approximation of the vision of unrefined sexual orgasm.*8

I think the best example that may summarize the best of Laxma’s intentions is his etching ‘Untitled’ of 1971.*1 This particular print marks a turning point in Laxma’s printmaking career. In this print, we see the relationship of the two assuming a definite and even complex proportion. In a chequered mat like a raft afloat on a dark void, the nude mates are perched in a fateful togetherness. G.M. Sheikh approached this significant print as follows; "A gigantic, phallic ‘lizard’ severed from the body of man, sniffing the legs of the woman, appears on the shore, while a pitch dark snake slithers through the placid current of the dark terrain. The half risen female with a mane of matted hair – like a woman aroused - is juxtaposed with the unmoving image of a pensive male. It seems that either the act is over or perhaps yet to take place, but there is no dialogue, verbal or physical. The stark and unnerving realization is further heightened by the visitation of the lizard looming over the
scene like an alter ego of the couple's combined paradox of love. The rendering of the female is more intimate with the sexual parts of her body conspicuously pronounced."

If we seriously study the artworks of Laxma in this period, we come to discover a number of unique qualities in the execution of his artworks as well as in the deep and mysterious roots of his intentions. Both his themes and artworks are striking enough to captivate the viewer and to capture the desire of the art collectors. Before we go further, let us bring to focus, the interesting linocut print Laxma did as an outstanding illustration to express his feeling towards the victims of the war of 1971. This print was published in the famous 'Vrishchik' art magazine, Baroda, in the same year. Let us now go through some of his outstanding individual qualities, such as the creation of a surreal fantasy world of carnal sexual desires, frustrations or fulfillment, serving the purpose of purging one's subjective sexual reality. In this sense, the early etchings of Laxma share a common ground with wall graffiti, evoking the associated bewilderment, angst and dejection. Laxma had discarded the fragmented spatial constructions for a more naturalistic spatial coherence. Bringing his childhood village as a background, now the more specific protagonists are the rustic villagers. The earlier overtness has now given way to more suggestive and sensitive tenderness. However, it is a matter of fact that Laxma has been subjected to severe criticism for the sexual overtones in his prints and drawing. Their argument that erotica is an anti-traditional element, can be dismissed as baseless. For there are phases in Indian art that are more overtly erotic, portraying the sexual act and various forms.

The year 1975 saw a new departure, the introduction of fresh subjects - nails, scrap metals, tools. For instance, a row of pegs and nails secures a woman's jaw to her neck and her skin is as neatly mended and sutured as her ragged garb. Here we see Laxma took strongly to some recent pencil drawings. His main objects were - in addition to what we already mentioned - implements, parts of furniture, tins, wires and strings, shoes and shelves, chains, keys and locks; a repertory of characters from wayside shops and odd corners of houses. The junk, so it seemed, is assembled in carefully planned formations, heightening the role of objects as dramatis personae - in the absence of their users. Their forms are sharpened precisely to focus on their corners and curves, or pouted along the edges to suggest the sensation of human contact. Worthwhile here to refer is his pencil drawing of 1977. Laxma has, however, woven these objects or their forms into human bodies, with the
result that the skin, as if moulded on a cobbler's stand, has curled and dried like a shoe. The cloth, tin and leather are bonded together to make the surface of the body - the human is being sewn with a human garment, the skin parchment. A sense of decay is evident in the stuffed faces as if stitched with strings and mended with nails and screws, not different from the ornaments dangling out of their pierced noses and ears. "The human figure isolated as a bust, confronts us with its lonely, ravaged countenance. The packed bodies of tribals and peasants, through years of droughts and floods, are built in sharp angular surfaces, dried and withered, yet their heads held in defiance."

By this stage, the sexual drama came to be transmitted without the loss of passion and intensity in a dialogue between the mates and also metaphorically, between the couple and surrounding. The couple has now come to rest, relax, mate and communicate in these prints. Laxma's image of man has grown out of the beast in him, whereas in turn, the female is slightly idealized like that in traditional Indian art. The woman is no more a sexual object. Perhaps love has redeemed and enriched the sexual experience. In his print, an entranced female looks back towards the male who, bent yet agile, speaks to her in a mimetic gesture. The mood of the scene, permeates the environment, yet unlike it, it is not of exhilaration or ecstasy, but is tinged with gentle pathos. The strained face of the man and his bent torso counteract the lush foliage and infuse in it a mild sadness. Laxma introduced little change in his themes, as we may observe, from around the end of the year 1978 till the mid-eighties, in that, he began weaving his figures tenderly, these figures were the subtle nuances of feeling and intimate knowledge of plants. They are no longer sexualized, except the tall and dark columnar trunks. Nature too has assumed character and also noticeably greater identification of the artist with his characters. They now belong to a place and time. Their tribal stock, their dress and ornaments, characteristically their own. This period may be considered as his third phase. His work during this period is characterized by more sedate encounters between his long-limbed women and his fine-boned men meeting in a jungle of flowering trees and bushes, the sap rises through a myriad of vegetal forms. These are the old themes of mystic love in a vernal setting that thrilled the hearts and minds of Indian miniature artists.

This phase, which came to an end in the mid-80s, was only a base for his recent phase that started around the year 1985. Laxma believes that he has been obsessed, even intoxicated
with sex, but in fact, he was obsessed with the whole spectrum of the human body. He has also been obsessed with another aspect concerning his individual approach to his medium - the medium and the message. He once said, "I like to make a groove in the plate that is so pure, so clean, so hard, that it stands by itself; the purity of the line, the purity of the print is very straight and very sensuous, close to my innermost self. All the metaphysics of the print medium, the gimmicks, are not for me. When I was taught the language of prints, the two aspects - the human body and the purity of the line** - coalesced into my soul so that print became a part of my nature. Once these prints come out, they become my seeds, they will grow into my tree, my life, my environment."** I want my audience to see my work as an insider, as someone who understands what I am doing, I want to reduce them with my line. When there is such an interaction, taking place between a viewer and my work, there is a pure sense-laden movement of communication full of love and peace. It is a point of pure joy."**

Laxma believes that there is a potential power and quality, we can find hidden in a line and that is the mystery that only a true artist can bring out. It is there in the line that Paul Klee talks about and also it is there in the women of Picasso.** They ooze with life. Line, for Laxma, is his lifeline; he will never be tired of it. However, the striking show of his mysterious prints has been already over by the end of the decade of 70s. This glorious and splendid decade of his printmaking career can be considered as the peak of his summit in the realm of his outstanding projection and genius. From mid-eighties onwards, the course of Laxma's artistic career somehow changed. Though he had a slight downfall, he again rose up tightly holding onto his talent and rich experience to handle the acrylic colours with his masterly qualities. We can refer here to his acrylic paintings of old urban houses and the outstanding acrylic composition that depicts four erotic acts of the acute god ‘Lord Ganesha’ - blissfully and lustfully using his ritual trunk to make love to a buxom sexual young lady.** In fact, this radical project is very beautiful, nonetheless amazing and controversial. I think this outstanding four-scene erotic delineation of the handsome ‘Lord Ganesha’ is one of the landmarks in contemporary Indian art. As for me, nothing is more enjoyable or exciting than this amazing coloured projection.

Laxma is a familiar figure here in Baroda, he often came to participate in the graphic workshops. I can refer here to the famous all India graphic arts workshop, which was
conducted in March 1994. In this significant workshop, Laxma did some striking colour etching and viscosity. It was a unique opportunity to see the perfect handling of the medium and the magical movements of his hand, marking him a genius of the secrets and technique of printmaking. It is for this reason that we should not miss to include such an eminent printmaker in our thesis. However, following him beyond the mid-90s, we find him also do a good number of mixed media drawings - using either graphite pencil and opaque watercolour on the same composition, or restrict to 'gouache,' or wash technique on handmade paper. But, in any case, he never gave up his amazing colour etching creations with erotic themes, which are his incessant obsession. We can still enjoy looking at his 'Woman and Goat,' gouache on pencil, 1998. I am sure, Baroda is quite proud of its product. Such unique output is unrivalled and hard to repeat. Laxma Goud is, indeed, a matchless etcher.