CHAPTER II

INCEPTION OF MODERN ART IN KASHMIR

THE FIRST GENERATION

1950 - 1970

1950 is a convenient date to narrate the beginning of modern art initiatives in Kashmir. Owing it influences to the forces of post-independent India where the celebration of freedom from the colonial rule anticipated a cultural practice which reflected a greater sense of social commitment as shared by the burgeoning socialist movements in the country. In the domain of modern art the role of Progressives, as self-confessed modernists, came as a rescue from the traditionalist or historicist/nationalist captivity of the early decades. Patronizing individualism, eclecticism and a celebrative mode of freedom the Indian modern art assumed a militant stance. Progressives unapologetically broadened their artistic horizon by their extravagant opening up to the western influences, however, the yearning to return to rural roots, still being a potent artistic element, was considerably different from the traditional confines of the early decades. These are the times when every ambitious Indian artist wanted to have a firsthand experience of the western art world, preferably, Paris the hub of international modern art pregnant with all the great stories about the great artists. The spirit of the 50s, the phrase used by Ratan Parimoo, launches a radical shift from the early development of modernism in India. The Progressive forces of late 40s, as it were, came of age only by 50s when Baroda came into the picture. In a centennial celebration of Contemporary Indian art and Kumar Gallery Parimo writes:

The 'spirit' of the 'zeitgeist' of a time or era in the life of a culture...is a Hegelian concept as the circumstances at the beginning of the Post-Independence period of India, considering the tremendous fervor and optimism in so many spheres-political, social, economic and cultural forms (literature, theater, film, dance,
music, architecture) appropriately justify bringing in this notion here.

...The private patronage which was forthcoming at that juncture through the Kumar Gallery (since 1950s) whose moving spirit was Virendra Kumar Jain, a young but a bold enterprising person whose gamble in supporting many of the emerging artists now proves him to have been so perceptive and so full of insight. Combining business acumen with eye for the significant art works and through these the artists who created them, his place is as much a part of this National 'Zeitgeist' of the 1950s, as much as the actual artists themselves, as one fired by the same 'spirit'.

The next generation of artists who followed on the heels of the previous generation was also spotted by the sharp eyes of Virendra Kumar, like Biren De, Ram Kumar, Krishen Khanna, Shanti Dave, G. R. Santosh, A. Ramachandran and others. Of course, especially history will remember him for his dramatic intervention in the rise of Tantric Art. Its discovery in the 'Indian tradition' by his 'putsch' to Ajit Mookerjee's research on Tantra Art, besides consistent support for many years to Ghulam Rasool Santosh (one of the most characteristic of Tantra artists).

...Virendra Kumar's involvement with the creative careers of the struggling artists from 1950s onwards should be regarded as much a part of the historical growth of contemporary Indian Art. The way he, along with his brothers, promoted the artistic development of some of them like Kulkarni, Husain, Souza, Santosh and Ramachandran, shows his faith in their creative intuitions.  

The similar zeitgeist found its impact even in a relatively remote place like Kashmir. In the wake of Sheikh Abdullah led National Conference, which launched a sustained campaign against subjugation, poverty and social imbalances, the cultural life of Kashmir, especially in the field of poetry, was imbued with a sense of revolt and political satire. It is during this time of national awakening which coincided with the direct encounter with some of the influential Progressive artists present in Kashmir that a few local self-conscious artists identified with the mainstream impulses of the 50s and ventured upon their individual journeys.

The Progressive Artists Association in Kashmir aimed at modeling itself on the pattern of Bombay progressives. The awareness of the modern art came largely by their interaction with the artist who were sojourning in Kashmir. There is
mention of other sources like films and journals, which possibly was brought by the similar artists who happened to be travelling in Kashmir. In a conversation with Triloke Kaul he recounts his first encounter with Raza who besides encouraging their artistic talent also shared with them his books, pamphlets and various written material about modern art. On one account he gifted Butt and Triloke a book about Van Gough, which particularly had a deep and lasting influence on Butt. The most cathartic influence came by way of an initiative described as UNESCO Travelling Print Exhibition held in a local Hotel around early fifties, which showcased the life-size reproductions of the works of almost all the great masters of western modern art from Impressionism to Picasso. However, the most convenient and discernibly immediate source of early inspiration was the considerate involvement of S H Raza during his frequent visits in the Valley. The reason that the earliest experimentation was largely dominated by impressionist/fauvist or cubist/expressionist vocabulary of modern art was largely due to Raza’s influence. The relatively open-ended paradigm of Progressive aesthetic ideology attracted many young local artists. The more ambitious artists started planning to leave the valley and prove their worth in the mainstream of Indian modernism. While others brushed shoulders with the local intelligentsia and absorbed themselves in various art-administrative governmental jobs.

After the establishment of Institute of Music and Fine Arts (1965) and the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art Culture and Languages (1963), in both Jammu and Srinagar, the modern art activities became more organized. Modelled on the pattern of Baroda curriculum of 50s/60s, the Institute of Music & Fine Arts became the only discernible platform to practice, promote and more specifically to encourage new artists and thus anticipate the future prospects of modern art in Kashmir. One can easily trace the Baroda orientation that engaged the students and still finds its resonance in the present generation. We can trace the conceptual and stylistic influences of Baroda,
which interestingly bears its stamp more in the sculpture medium. For obvious reasons that Santosh or Triloke Kaul, the first Kashmiri students to pass out from Baroda, never chose to teach. But among the second batch of students like Gayoor Hassan and V R Khajuria, who specialized in sculpture under the supervision of Shanko Chaudhuri and both subsequently headed the first sculpture departments in Srinagar and Jammu art Institute respectively, had more immediate followers.

A little earlier in 1948 the first self-consciously modern art group often referred to as Trio was formed by the three active members of the Front P N Kachru, S N Butt and Triloke Kaul, which eventually was renamed as Progressive Artists’ Association in October 1948. In May 1949, the association held its first show in Srinagar. Among some of the influential people who witnessed the show was Percy Brown who declared: “the movement aptly represents the progressive trend by bridging the abysmal gulf of five hundred years, thus linking the tradition with present.” Synchronizing with the Progressives spirit as foregrounded by groups like Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi Silpi Chakra in 40s and Madras Cholamandal in 50s the Progressive Artists’ Association of Kashmir was founded roughly in the same time with the experienced patronage of S H Raza. The most important factor that defines the course of the future development and participation of local artists is mainly due to two reasons. Firstly because of Raza’s active presence in the Valley which anticipated a certain space where many aspiring individuals could share their dreams of artistic ambitions and secondly artists like Ghulam Rasool Santosh, Triloke Kaul and Kishori Kaul, the first batch of Kashmiri artists trained in M S University Baroda, brought with them a lucid and academically articulate vocabulary of Indian modern art in Kashmir. And thus, it is important to note, the Kashmir’s modern art scene follows the evolutionary link between the outward avant-gardism of Progressives and the inward, more self-conscious, alternative modernism of Baroda.
The presence of Raza, who after founding the Bombay Progressives kept travelling in India and eventually settled in France, plays a significant role in the development of the local Kashmiri artists. Raza’s frequent visits to Kashmir were largely motivated by his early experiments in landscape idiom. During this period of early 40s he found Kashmir the most ideal location to work out his fluent water colours of landscapes and townscapes executed in an expressionist mode, which gradually moved towards abstraction in his later years. It is important to mention that the landscape painting as one of the major tendencies of the early post-independent Indian art was dominated largely by two distinctively different influences. While the one current was suggestive of the romanticism of miniature traditions and the other was informed by the Victorian realism, the characteristic 19th century interest in picturesque as reflected in the works of the British painters who came on painting tours to India. Both the tendencies find a considerable echo in Bengal School. However, what gave Progressives a certain consensus to transcend the narrow traditionalism of Company School and some part of the Bengal School was in their radical shift to an individualistic stance. This is the characteristic that dominates the progressive artists. They rather sought their inspiration from the individualistic position shared by Indian artists like Amrita Sher-Gil, Gemini Roy and Rabindranath Tagore and from the west it was the real time participation of Walter Langhammer or more specifically the influence of Austrian-born expressionist painter Oscar Kokoschka. Langhammer was a key personality, as artist, critic and patron, responsible for encouraging and promoting the modern art movement in Bombay during the 1940's. Langhammer’s is also important for introducing Kokoschka's style of panoramic landscapes of the great European cities in pure hues, the influence that guides the landscape paintings of Bendre and more particularly the expressionistic renderings of Raza’s urban landscapes. The similar current, as passed through the two artists Raza and Bendre who are directly linked with
the major part of modern art experiments by Kashmiri artists, seems working behind Somnath Butt’s stylized landscapes, consisting of vertical and horizontal shafts of lines and colors.⁵

Reflecting on the artistic concerns of the post-partition in general and Raza’s preoccupations during the period of his visits to Kashmir Gayatri Sinha observes:

Raza's "Cityscape" (1946) and "Baramula in Ruins" (1948) both reflect his anguish over partition and the vulnerability of a Muslim in Mumbai during the riots. He said "On the one side there was a national tragedy. As personal history for my family these critical years of 1947 to 1948 were those of tragedy and separation. In July 1947 my mother died in my house in Bombay; early in the next year in 1948, my father passed away in Mandla. Linked with this period of riots and killings and hatred there was my private history and my personal sense of loss."⁶ In his work on the devastation in Baramula, it is the enduring damage to this Kashmiri town that is etched - human beings are conspicuous by their absence.⁷

Raza, it needs to be mentioned, unlike his Progressive contemporaries who largely dealt with figural subjects, chose to focus on landscape in an impressionist and fauvist manner, which later adopted an expressionist mode. It becomes obvious that his frequent sojourns in Kashmir were basically motivated by his passionate indulgence to seek aesthetic possibilities in the motifs from nature. It is in this context that as early as in 1946 there are accounts where Raza along with his H R Gade, another very significant contemporary of Raza, met young artist like Som Nath Butt and Triloke Kaul. It is believed that Raza was profoundly impressed with their dedication, ambitious restlessness to venture into the vocabulary of modern art.⁸ While it was basically Raza’s aesthetic preoccupation with the scenic nature of rural India which brought him to Kashmir, but his works assumed a gloomy aura as soon as he realized the human plight caused by the communal riots during
partition. From the emotionally potent and subjective stance of expressionism it becomes obvious that Raza’s landscape-oriented work was deeply suffused with the element of human tragedy in the midst of bloody partition, the concern that, however, does not seem to be so visible in the works of Butt or his contemporaries, like Triloke Kaul and P N Kachru. On the contrary all the three artists shared a somewhat similar attitude where the formalistic problems or stylistic possibilities dominated the subjective or personal convictions. However, as a kind of mentor, patron or the guide many young artists owe their initial enthusiasm to their interaction with Raza.

**DINA NATH WALI (1908-2006)**

Wali remains to be the most senior among the early students who availed training from Amar Singh Technical Institute in Srinagar. The Amar Singh Technical Institute of Srinagar was establishment by Maharaja Pratap Singh with the patronage of Sir Walter Lawrence, the settlement commissioner of Jammu and Kashmir. These schools trained students in engineering, floral design, clay modeling, painting, carpentry and smithy. These institutes were modelled on the British pattern of Victorian academic realism, which included a set number of studio practices like drawing from the model, nature studies in watercolor, portraits from life and oil painting. Most of these painters preferred the landscape idiom, for obvious reasons as the scenic beauty of Kashmir was the most captivating and unavoidable subject.

Wali’s Company School-oriented watercolor landscapes serves as the most immediate testaments of the times. However, provincial in his aesthetic aims, Wali remains to be the first Kashmiri painter who earned quite a considerable recognition outside the Valley. As Keshav Malik recollects:
I too nostalgically remember Sir Amar Singh Technical Institute and the bucolic Principal J.C. Mukerjee. Then one goes on to remember Amar Singh College and the vivacious Prof. Madan, for instance. One remembers the springs and summers, autumns and winters of Hazuribagh with its long lines of Chinars (cut down to make a sports stadium); the merry mulberry trees, and the silk worm by the silk factory; the snow-line and the moving waters of Vitasta; the smell of wood in the *doonga* (freight boat) carting logs; flower and grass growing roofs; Hari Parbat at dawn and dusk; the seven bridges: vistas of poplars; ruins of the marvelous black-lime-stone temples of Avantipora, Mrand and others; saffron fields of Pampore in autumn; the holiness of the waters of Sheshnag; *gubbas; namdaas*, paper mache and the wood crafts; walnuts, almonds and the slow *pheran* walk; the limpid lakes; the concentric circles on the waters; the gay exhibition grounds; Mahjoor, Azad and Nadim. 

It is this colorful milieu and its rural virginity that Wali wanted to express as an artist. Known for his watercolors, one of the favorite mediums of the company period, Wali shared the restlessness of a modern artist who spent his youth wandering for an ideal piece of location to paint his landscape and never bothered much if they will ever be sold. Somewhat seduced by the natural grandeur, he choose a certain detachment from the mainstream of modern art idioms and painted the picturesque surroundings as faithfully as academic realism had taught him. However, as he moved out of the Valley he was immediately noticed by many important art-connoisseurs and critics of the time. In his frequent visits to Calcutta, motivated by his interest in watercolor, he came in contact with Percy Brown and O.C. Gangoli, the two influential personalities of Bengal School. In 1953 Percy Brown inaugurated Wali’s first one-man show in Nedou’s Hotel Srinagar where some of his paintings were also sold. In 1954 he held is second one-man show at Jehangir Art Gallery Bombay, which was followed by a show at All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society's Delhi. In his 1956 show in Calcutta O. C. Gangoli addressed the audience. This relatively constant participation, a privilege which only a few local artists of the times enjoyed, was a great source of encouragement. Wali is
also a poet, quite famous as *Almast* Kashmiri in the literary circles of the Valley.

His watercolors may not fit into the vocabulary of modernism, but they serve as simple representations of some of the important landmarks of the Valley, for instance the works possibly between late 30s and 50s like *Akbar's Bridge* (pl. 1), *Houseboat in Moonlight* (pl.2), *Riverside Temple* (pl.3), *Dal Lake in Summer* (pl.4) and so on. When camera was not an affordable aid his works serve as genuine visual documentations of places and its people, which in the course of urbanization have seen a noticeable change. In a certain way, however not so self-consciously, his work may fall into the early Santinekatan initiatives to incorporate nature in its immediacy and the experiential stance. Moreover, Wali’s landscapes are a pure visual delight for anybody interested to experience the un-trodden and the untamed glory of Kashmir.

**SOMNATH KHOSA**

By mid 40s Somnath Butt and Somnath Khosa, after completing their elementary courses in painting from Amar Singh Technical Institute Srinagar, decided to peruse painting as a full time profession. Both trained in the Victorian realism, an early twentieth century academic orientation most accessible and relatively well organized in the different parts of the country, which bay and large served the colonial interests. By 1930s both had perfected their skills, especially, in oil painting. Khosa’s significance lies within the Swadeshi spirit but not in terms of seeking an alternative or revivalist pictorial vocabulary his art was more of a propaganda kind where content overrides style. In the ideological backdrop of Bengal School the Swadeshi sentiment was guiding the artistic spirit of the times. As early as 1922 Abanindranath Tagore painted the rare meeting of Rabindranath Tagore, C F Andrews and Gandhi; Nandalal Bose’s famous linocut of Gandhi as he set out on his 240
mile 1930 Padyatra to break the Salt Act or even earlier nationalistic rendering in the works of Ravi Verma or J.P. Gangoli; Gaganendranath Tagore’s satirical and caricaturist depictions of the British rule.

Portraiture, ironically based on British realism, became a most sought genre among patriotic-oriented artist. Somnath’s portraits are often considered at par with Hemen Majumdar and Atul Bose. In the wake of Independence and patriotism many Indian artists engaged with the political themes, a preoccupation which surfaced with a great zeal in the early British Raj. Both painters and sculptors, charged with the feverish struggle for freedom created works explicit in its nationalistic fervor. The nationalistic preoccupation of the Bengal School, however, foregrounded revivalist tendencies to seek a certain renaissance by drawing their sources from the indigenous past and thereby maintain a conscious resistance to western influences. But Somnath Khosa, like for instance K M Adimoolam, is mainly remembered for their contribution to capture some of the historic moments in Gandhi’s life. But unlike Adimoolam who was well-versed in modern vocabulary, Somnath’s work remained confined both in terms of subject matter and stylistic character. In this way Somnath’s significance, on the contrary, may be established on the fact that his works provide an immediate testament of the early political life of India. In other word he sacrificed his aesthetic aims for a political cause.

It is in the context of pure documentation, however not of his immediate socio-political space of Kashmir, but largely mainstream centering around Mahatma Gandhi and his associates, that Somnath’s contribution can be justified. In spite of the fact that Somnath shared the political convictions of Bengal School or the general intelligentsia of the times but on artistic merit his work somehow seems trapped within the British/Victorian realism, the schooling he could not transcend. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi’s call he consciously decided to contribute his artistic skills for the political cause. He spent the last twenty five
years of his life painting realist works on Gandhi, for instance, *Gandhi ji looking after Shri Parchure Shastri*, (pl.11), the Sanskrit scholar who was fighting with leprosy, *Gandhi ji with Lord and Lady Mountbatten*, (pl.12), *Gandhi ji at Madras Station*, 1947 (pl.13), and a somewhat dreamy representation in the possibly later work, *Evening walk at Juhu Beach*, (pl.14). These works are available in various museums and private collections like Gandhi Smriti in New Delhi and Birla Haveli & Museum at Pilani. A small body of his work is also archived by Neville Tuli of Osian's, Mumbai.

**SOMNATH BUTT** (1925 - 1973)

Unlike Khosa, Somnath Bhat never had such a unique opportunity or a choice to decide his professional career. However, while Khosa’s more or less secure position and professional complacency kept him bound to the traditional paradigm of academic realism Butt on the contrary ventured into the non-conformist and therefore the difficult position of identifying with the modern artist. While Khosa shares the conservatism of D N Wali, who is known for his watercolors to record the rural life of Kashmir more or less in the same manner as Khosa depicted the political life of India in the wake of Independence. However, they also differ in the choice of medium, while Khosa’s preference for oil color gives a certain sense of precedence over the way Wali did his watercolors. But unlike both of them it is predictable that Butt’s popularity or professional success may have been relatively slow and confronted with challenges.

Butt is considered among the earliest and perhaps the first truly self-conscious modern artist of Kashmir. His association with Cultural Front, a socio-political and cultural platform founded in 1947, brought him close to two more aspiring artists P N Kachru and Triloke Kaul and subsequently they got introduced to
S.H. Raza, which anticipates his active involvement with the idiom and the ideology of modern art. After joining the Progressive Artists’ Association in October 1948 along with Kaul and Kachru and subsequently participating in its exhibitions Butt’s talent came in the notice of various influential elites of the time, notably Percy Brown, Raza and Grade. The most significant event in the early development of Butt was Raza’s initiative to organize a two-man show of Butt and Triloke Kaul in Bombay in 1949. This was the first ever exhibition of local modern artists outside Kashmir. As Triloke Kaul recalls: “The exhibition was a great boost to not only two of us but also the other aspiring artists of the Valley. Its importance is also based on the fact that at that time Bombay Progressive Group was hardly two year old and we had the privilege to interact with some of its forerunners. However, it was Butt’s paintings which stole the show. Raza and his artist-friends wanted us to stay in Bombay for some time. I for personal reasons was not in a position to stay longer. But Somnath Butt stayed for a year or two.”

The Bombay media describes Butt’s works as ‘semi-abstract landscapes’, and ‘wizard color combinations’. These chromatic abstract-oriented landscapes, like **Untitled**, 1970 (pl.15) at once reminiscent of Raza’s works of the period, remains a constant stylistic engagement almost throughout Butt’s artistic career.

Butt’s early works, as was the case with most other artists, may have been influenced by his training in the Technical Institutes modelled on British realism, which foregrounded the accurate description of the ordinary and observable world. However, his reputation is largely based on his encounter with the modern art. There are accounts which refer to his very early inclination to depict things in a visual language. It is believed that his artistic talent was discovered by some European who owned a Hotel in Gulmarg in which Butt had come to stay with his sister and brother-in-law. But the real encouragement came only when Raza noticed him. He is believed to have
selected Butt as his student among the number of other aspiring artists and literally taught him for about two months. With the help of Raza he was virtually introduced to various modern art movements and art historical facts. Soon after this privileged education he started experimenting with various idioms, notably the cubism of Picasso and expressionism of Van Gough, the two stylistic influences which guided his work throughout his career. In two-man show in Mumbai in 1950 the media responded: “A new star is born on art horizon of the country.”

The Mumbai exhibition may have triggered more enthusiasm and there are accounts of his renewed vigor and variety in experimentation. It is believed that M F Husain during his visits to Kashmir would make sure that he meets Butt; however, there is no discernable evidence of Husain’s influence on his work. Butt’s is also known to have shared his skilled knowledge by providing the early education to his juniors like Santosh and Kishori Kaul. Besides painting Butt also received a scholarship to study Kashmir Shawl Designs, the preoccupation which later secured his job in the School of Design to nourish the local tradition of handicrafts.

Despite some great accounts of his ambitiously perused artistic life the paintings of Butt are rarely available. Either disappeared in the course of the tragic migration of Pundits or lying in some private possession, ironically, only a single image of his painting is circulating both in the Academy catalogues and on internet. The relatively most productive years of his career are believed to be either early 50s or the first few years before his early death in 1973. But at this moment except the work included here, painted just two years before his death, no other work of his early period could be traced.

Remembered as the unsung Vincent van Gough of the Valley, Butt may not be sharing the aesthetic revolution of van Gough, but he strongly felt the weight of
his ambitious vocation and in a somewhat desperate haste disappeared from the ever challenging milieu of modern art world.

TRILOKE KAUL (b. 1925)

Triloke Kaul remains to be the most prolific and aesthetically articulate among the so-called Trio group. Like Butt and Kachru he too was among the first privileged few to join the tribe of modern artists under the direct guidance of Raza. In the modern art world such coming together under some kind of a group whether named or not, as in case of the name Trio Kaul assertively maintains that this name never exited attributing it to some kind of romantic fascination with the term, at least proved very significant to create a space of dialogue and discussion with other fellow artists. There are accounts that during this time the local artists enthusiastically participated in discussions debating about various intellectual nuances of art. In the presence of intellectually stimulating and erudite mainstream artists of India like Raza, Gade and later many others it is very much possible that the local artists were conscious of the most vital debates revolving around authenticity and the national/modem dichotomy. Possibly brought by some of the reputed artists who were visiting to Kashmir, they were introduced to the work and style of Impressionists, Post- impressionists, Paul Klee, Kandinsky, Picasso, Matisse, and the like. This needs to be stated that by then the historical initiative of Rabindranath Tagore to organize the Bauhaus exhibition in 1922 in Kolkata bringing original works of Klee, Itten, Kandinsky and their students on the Indian soil was already one of the most disseminated information about the modern art-practice in the west. And secondly the influential presence of Walter Langhammer in the formative years of Bombay Progressives who was instrumental in bringing the influence of Expressionism, the idiom that suited
most of the Indian artists for its subjective and existential stance. So Raza, for instance, was very much loaded when he was interacting with the local artist, which had a considerable and sustainable influence especially on the first generation of self-conscious modern artist of the Valley. We get to know a growing enthusiasm shared by the artist to explore different techniques and experiments in the fashionable mediums of the time.

Not happy with the provincial aura of the modern art scene in the Valley Triloke Kaul left for Baroda. In late 50s Baroda was the most sought after art institute in India. Known for the highly effective pedagogic strategies of Bendre, who before coming to Baroda as a teacher was widely exhibited and widely travelled painter of India. The stylistic eclecticism of Bendre’s personal aesthetic concerns like post-impressionism, Fauvism, Expressionism and later Cubism and his early schooling in British academic realism of Indoor School had a discerning and yet subtle influence in his teaching. His tonal manipulation to create an effect of radiance; his adherence to the traditional gouache and above all his preference of landscape and portrait idiom was passed on to his students. But more than these stylistic demonstrations Bendre’s real pedagogy lied in his relationship with students. He never treated them as lesser than himself, a unique position rarely seen in today’s teacher-student interaction. It is within this special provision of freedom that his students flourished as mature individual artist even during their student days. The same privilege was granted to Triloke Kaul, Santosh and Ratan Parimoo of Kashmir who along with Bendre himself, K G Subramanyan who was a young colleague of Bendre, Shanti Dave, Prabha Dongre, Kumud Patel, Balakrishnan Patel, Himant Shah, Jyoti Bhatt, Praful Dave, Ramesh Pandya, and Vinay Trivedi, and later Vinod Shah, Vinodray Patel and Gulammohammed Sheikh formed the Baroda Group. With the active help of Bendre the group held its
first exhibition in Bombay in 1956 and later many shows in Delhi and Bombay, the two most busy art centers of the times.

The Group soon transformed into an intellectual forum inviting more artists to participate in the brainstorming negotiating various concerns of the times from aesthetic to general socio-political life. Triloke Kaul had already earned fare recognition as a modern painter in the Valley before he enrolled himself in Baroda. But prior to Baroda his work was largely informed by the landscape idiom of early Raza and perhaps closer to Butt. However, Baroda imparted his work with a certain Cubistic-abstraction which by late 60s subsequently transformed into the explicitly abstract vocabulary. The metamorphosis that still dominates his body of work and can safely be identified with it. As the Kashmiri art historian teaching in Baroda, Ratan Parimoo, describes: “Triloke Kaul was probably one of the first to turn to Cubism. He applied with surprising success the Cubist language to Kashmir subject-matter particularly to motifs of house and boats. Their planes and straight lines easily lent themselves to Cubist, analysis. But bearing in mind that the original Cubists concentrated mostly on still-life (where it was easier to delimit space and volume) compressing landscape element into flat intersecting planes was quite daring on the part of Kaul.”

It is interesting to notice that the element of abstraction assumes a hypothetical importance among the modern artists of Kashmir. A retrospective overview provides a convincingly palpable identity of abstract-orientation when we study the development of Kashmiri artists. Like Kaul, Santosh too shares a somewhat similar artistic development. He too started off in an impressionist landscape mode and eventually after his stints with various modern art idioms adopts an abstract vocabulary, however, quite different in its conceptual rigor from Kaul. Whether abstract or abstract-orientation the same tradition is carried on when we come across other artists like P N Kachru, Nisar Aziz, Suraj Tiku, M. Sadiq.
and Manohar Kaul, and from second generation Gayoor Hassan, the major part of Bhushen Koul, A R John, A K Raina, K Khosa, and many younger artists of the present generation. The possible preoccupations of the cultural and historical link with the heritage that may have contributed or caused a certain archetypal psyche finds some discussion in the chapter on Santosh.

The immediate characteristic of Triloke Kaul’s work lies in its resonating painterly vertical stripes. While the work **Untitled**, 1957 (pl.16) may appear to be vividly inspired by his early association with Raza for its rugged expressionist outlook but the work bears a heavier stamp of Bendre, for instance his 1955 work *The Thorn*. But while Bendre preferred a darker plate Kaul on the other hand illuminates his painting with chromes and scarlets, the recurrent characteristic that surfaces almost throughout his body of work. The architectural dynamism of his landscapes is also reminiscent of Cezanne’s geometrical treatment, an influence that seems so inevitable to any modernist experiment in landscape. The motifs of triangular house-tops, a typical Kashmir architecture, synchronizing with cone-shaped mountain-peaks and more peculiarly with the cone-shaped Kashmiri hat in works like *Autumn Aerial*, 1975 (pl.17). Like Bendre, Kaul choose landscape idiom because it provided a certain ease to incorporate various stylistic influences. Kaul’s treatment of color in broad splashes, the choice of color and the spontaneity of overall compositional order also recalls the Bauhaus, especially the musical element of Kandinsky. But while Kandinsky’s landscape-oriented paintings are more rich in color variations and lyrical in its treatment of the figure Kaul retained a minimum color plate and a certain Cezannesque adherence to vertical and horizontal movement of the brush.

Kaul’s painterly treatment attains a Rothko-like stance as his landscapes undergo a certain metamorphosis. The American Abstract Expressionist, known for his rectangular fields of color and light which subsequently assumed
a preoccupation with the transcendental and the sublime. Formally the major stylistic difference between the two is while Rothko’s broad and unmodulated fields of color largely retained certain horizontality, Kaul on the other hand seems more inclined to adopt a vertical flow in his translucent and exquisitely painted canvases Untitled, 1975 (pl. 18).

Kaul’s work is also reflective of a certain liking for Henry Matisse’s outright demonstration of design, reducing content to a lovely pattern and seeking end in from, a characteristic that also finds its significance in the Bauhaus approach to design which remains one of the vital influence in the Baroda of 50s and 60s. However, Kaul’s position remains somewhat less ambitious than Santosh for his intense and well-wrought indulgence into one of the most esoteric and profoundly loaded indigenous art forms of ancient India. Kaul, on the other hand, choose a more or less convenient vocabulary of modern art which seemingly prefers the sensuous ethnic appeal of the Valley to the overtly spiritual; perceptual to the conceptual and material to the metaphysical.

It is possible to speculate that the transition from the earlier landscapes with quasi-figurative references to Kashmir to the abstract gestures may also have to do something with the drastic change in the recent political history of Kashmir; a phenomena very much recurrent in most of the Kashmiri Pundit artists. But unlike other artists such as Kachru and particularly Ratan Parimoo whose representational and narrative mode is loaded with the nostalgic yearnings, Kaul choose a subtle language to express his nostalgic fantasies Untitled (pl. 19 and 20). In this Kaul shares his aesthetic paradigm with Santosh, however, both are polar opposites in their conceptual framework. Above all Kaul’s body of work is mainly preoccupied with the formalism of expressionist abstraction and subtle undercurrents of cubistic and futuristic treatment to negotiate the plastic dynamism of pictorial space, movement and color modules. When asked as how did he decide to become a painter he would succinctly reply: “because
there is nothing I can do better.” Unlike most of the Expressionists since Van Gogh for whom art was more of an emotional outburst to express their existential crisis, Kaul treated art as a playful vocation primarily to seek pleasure, which, however, indirectly echoes the position of Santosh.

Triloke like Butt joined the School of Design as a director to patronize the traditional handicrafts of the State such as Tapestry, Carpet, Embroidery, Kani, Willow, Wood-carving, Turning, Metal and paper mache. In his artistic career Kaul has held numerous exhibitions across India, notably in Delhi, Bombay, Hyderabad and Calcutta. He has been honored with many awards from Bombay Art Society, All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society, Academy of Arts Amritsar and Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, J&K. Recently the Panun Kashmir Organization honored him the title of ‘Sharda Saman’.

P N KACHRU

P N Kachru, although senior to Triloke Kaul, is best remembered for his early initiatives to bring the first group of artists together. The founder of National Cultural Front founded in November 1947, Kachru’s real significance lies in his influential role to invite painters in the cultural space of the time. Due to various forms of discontinuity, lack of patronage and iconoclastic interventions the history of plastic arts in Kashmir is confronted with profound obscurity since roughly eleventh century. However, in the field of other arts, especially poetry Kashmir has relatively seen a rich tradition. Somewhat similar to the pre-Renaissance in Florence, it is possible to speculate, the identity of a painter may have been received with a similar prejudice among the poets and writers of Kashmir. It is in this sense Kachru’s, who was an active member of the Front comprising of the general intelligentsia of the Valley, thinkers, poets, writers, dramatists and musicians, he sought the participation of painters which
subsequently lead to the Progressive Artists Association in 1948. The Association was very instrumental in the individual development of many local artists by instilling in them a confidence to pursue their ambitious career.

As an artist Kachru may not share the aesthetic potential of artists like Butt or Triloke Kaul but as a cultural activist his contribution is laudable. Possibly an earlier work, My City (pl.21) Kachru, like his contemporary Kashmiri fellow artist, reflects his aesthetic debt to Raza. The painting, however in a bad shape, provides an aerial view to the valley inhabited with little hut-like squarish houses. The landscape format, abstract treatment and the textural quality is clearly reminiscent of Raza. While the Untitled, 1975 (pl.22) bears more resemblance to Triloke Kaul's expressionist abstraction. His later works appear sketchier, unfinished and deliberately illustrative, while reflective of the older preoccupation with architectural motifs (pl.23/24). At occasions the same sketchy and illustration-like treatment is applied to subjects evoking sensual or erotic connotations (pl. 25).

Kachru has held many shows since 1949 in Kashmir, Jammu, Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Hyderabad and Lucknow. He has been awarded many times by J&K Academy and Hyderabad Art Society. In 1988 he was honored with The Veteran Artists award by AIFACS, New Delhi. Besides he has been actively engaged in writing on various cultural concerns such as: Kashmir Buddhist sites - Harwan, Wushkar and Hulmar (Matan), Kashmir School of Terra Cottas - the Wushkar School. Megalithic site of Burzhom, Kashmir, Burzhom and Indus valley civilization, The living tradition of India-crafts of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh - Chapters of Papier-mâché and wood crafts, Mapin Publications Pvt. Ltd, Ahmadabad. "Stein's search for Codex Archetypus" - the paper was read out by the author on the occasion of Remembering Sir Aurel Stein."Lal Ded and Kashmiri Chroniclers"- the paper was read in the national seminar organized by Kashmir Education, Culture and Science Society, New
Delhi. "Kashmir's Contribution to Pahari Art Movement" - the paper was presented on 27th February, 2001 in the Conference Hall, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, and on various environmental issues as well.  

**KISHORI KAUL (1939)**

Enjoying a special position of being the first Kashmiri woman to join the tribe of modern artists, Kishori Kaul is remembered for her rigorously academic orientation. Intellectually stimulating and passionately involved she was more efficient in imbibing all that Bendre had to teach in his characteristic methods of practical demonstration. Her works during her study in Baroda reveal her passionate and keenly observed understanding of the basics of pictorial language as instructed by Bendre.

In a portrait study like **Mona Bendre, 1961** (pl.28), Bendre’s influence is quite visible in her post-impressionistic treatment reminiscent of the painterly construct of Bonnard and Vuillard, the two artists Bendre favored most, and the academically conventional subjects like portrait and still-life. After mastering the pictorial language based on the Baroda academicism she gradually ventured upon to incorporate a certain lyricism by diffusing the well-defined contours of Bendre’s fauvist/post-impressionist style, for instance in the work **Silver Grey, 1977** (pl.29). With the course of time, interestingly, her work too assumed a somewhat similar transformation as that of Triloke Kaul and Santosh. The earlier preoccupation with portrait and the still-life went through a certain diffusion to evolve into a more ethereal landscape oriented abstraction. The **Untitled, 1980**, (pl.30) is suffused with an expressionist sublime celebrating the emotive power of gestural and the painterly stance. This celebrative mode, however, unlike Triloke returned to the figurative in her later works. The works
like *Untitled* (pl.31), *Finesse*, 2001(pl.32), *Outburst*, 2001(pl.33), *Aspiration*, 2001 (pl.34) and the like reveal a renewed interest to work out sumptuously sensuous details of landscape motifs, at once suggestive of an exuberant and exhilarating memories of the colorful Valley. It is interesting to notice the potent feminine sensibility for investing a sense of gayness to her nostalgic subconscious. The microscopic observation and the delicate treatment to motifs like flowers, chinara leaves and the subtly decorative use of colors sets her apart from her Kashmiri contemporaries.

Kishori Kaul is often associated with artist like Laxman Pai, Anjolie Ela Menon, Manjit Bawa, Rameshwar Broota, Ganesh Pyne, Arpita Singh, for their shared preoccupation with the subconscious and the fantastic. As Mago describes: “Kishori’s works gained from Nature or emotion. Her drawing was basically an accessory to an emotion based on her coherent rhythm of color. Colors of light move on the canvas in a playful, somewhat impressionistically.”

Kishori learnt her first lessons of art from S N Butt. In 1959 she left for Baroda and like Santosh and Triloke she studied painting under the supervision of Bendre. From Baroda she moved to Delhi, where she eventually settled down. Kishori held numerous shows across India. The Art Heritage catalogue describes her: “The source of her works lies in the actual and metaphorical worlds of her childhood. The yellow ‘amaltash’ reminds us of the mustard fields of Kashmir.”

The very significant biographical fact about her is that in spite of her struggle with tuberculosis she dwells into the palpably sensuous and psychologically healthy and beautiful metaphors pregnant with the gifts of nature. Gifted with a poetic imagination so reminiscent of romanticists like Wordsworth the fountainhead of her aesthetic sources lies in nature, especially the nature
inhabited with her childhood memories. In a somewhat post-Cezzanesque or post-romanticist stance her verbal articulation provides a better comprehension of her work than any critical analysis would ever arrive at:

My process of conceiving a work is linked with Nature's inherent structures and their ability to strike a deep resonance within my memory. The downward rush of the crystalline water or a mountain stream, splattered with light streaking through the overhanging branches of trees, determines the structure of a painting...The sudden, swift flight of a bird, the limb of a tree cutting across space, the little world of my garden in the middle of the city—all become starting points for the reconstruction, through colour, of fleeting but profound sensations”.

Kishori’s subconscious mind and the time-scape of memory is loaded with subjective associations for which she finds the formalistic mode and abstract vocabulary most suitable to express. She writes:

To verbalize the texture, hue, shadow area and sudden burst of colour of a fleeting image imprinted on the mind's eye is difficult at the best of times. To rediscover in words the gallery of images that unfolds along the corridor of time is nearly impossible. What returns to verbal language is mostly a montage, with large areas of association missing. The perception and aesthetic assimilation of any visual experience do not even return in words. They get into the colour technique and style and permeate the artistic persona”.

**NISAR AZIZ**

Due to the great scarcity of first hand sources, primary sources or any other form of published material nothing much can be discussed about artists like Nisar Aziz, Mohd. Sadiq and Suraj Tiku. The possible reason that they did not find a definite and continued mention in the general information about the modern artists of the Valley may largely be due to their early retirement, lack
of necessary patronage, disillusionment or the absence of continued development in the quality or the productivity of their work. Although in representing the first generation of modern artists their contribution deserves some mention. Their significance as the founders is quite indispensible for any reference to the early developments in the modern history of Kashmir. Along with their contemporaries such as S.N. Butt, Triloke Kaul, P.N. Kachru, G. R. Santosh, Ratan Parimoo, they were convincingly the first initiators to launch a certain renaissance in the field of plastic arts in the Valley.

From the early accounts of their artistic output we can partly refer to a scarcely few images of their works available in the archives of J&K Academy or published in catalogues or internet and partly some facts can be gathered from various accounts where other artist have talked about them. In the first case, which refers to the most obscure and awfully undocumented artists, are a few images of Nisar Aziz and M. Sadiq. But in the case of Suraj Tiku a relatively more lucid account is available in the form of observations made by different artists of the Valley, which is published on some representative websites about Kashmiri Pundits.

While looking at Nisar Aziz’s undated painting *Untitled* (pl.37), one cannot simply ignore it as a meager testament of artistic evidence. The work reflects a certain virtuosity and aesthetic erudition that can only be achieved after a sustained practice with the oil pigment, the perceptually rigorous understanding of the subtle tonalities of color, the art-historically informed execution of the canvas space. The work, in its unorthodox and non-conformist stance, posits even greater expressionist/abstract bravado than his fellow artists like Triloke Kaul, Santosh and Kishori. In its gestural dynamism and the overall flat outlook the painting is marked with a vivid reminiscence to the abstract expressionism of Jackson Plock’s drip paintings. However, Nisar appears relatively controlled in his spontaneous mode to invite accidents.
Interestingly if there is any artist from India that his work may share its aesthetic or formalistic stance that is pre-minimal oil paintings of Nasreen Mohamdi of early 60s, or the collage mode of Jyoti Bhat’s post 60s paintings stuffed with heavy textures and the two-dimensional effect by means of incorporating concrete objects like metal scrapes, pieces of plywood and sand. Nisar like a true formalist treats painting primarily as a painterly language and thus shares his non-narrative mode of Indian art’s post 60 experimentation in the abstract idiom.

The work Untitled (pl.38) is, however, strikingly contrary to the first one for it shares the futuristic paradigm of artists like Duchamp. The serial or animation like repetition to evoke a sense of forward movement is directly reminiscent of Duchamp’s *Nude descending a Staircase*, 1912. Possibly Nisar may have encountered some photographic evidence of Duchamp’s work or otherwise it makes a miraculous manifestation of what may be taken as a sign of collective unconscious. From the local accounts it is maintained that he was very much active in the early phase of his career and would periodically participate in the annual exhibitions of the J&K Academy but his sudden retreat from the art scene remains a mystery which he possibly does not want to share.

**MOHD. SADIO (1937 – 1995)**

Sadiq is among the self taught artists who, however, learned his basic skills from Santosh. He too shares the similar fate like Nisar for his near-absence in the regional infrastructures supposed to serve as the archival information centers for the cultural heritage of the Valley. And the material that exists has not been archived with a professional ease to make its relevance as a significant cultural document for productive dissemination. From the titles of the works mentioned in the Academy brochure showing awardees since 1966 there is
only a single entry of Mohd. Sadiq’s work titled as Landscape Painting of 1976 Artists’ Award category. Two undated works published in the catalogue Unfortunately (pl.39/40) align closer to Triloke Kaul’s mode of abstraction. However, the most striking difference between the two is while Triloke painted reflects the expressionist gusto and gestural mode Sadiq’s paintings appear calmer and somewhat static in their horizontal repose. While they share the minimum economy of color Sadiq’s work tends more towards flatness. The flat color field and the recurrent use of well-defined horizontal grids, as in the other work Unfortunately, 1977 (pl.41), instinctively, brings him closer to the minimalist paradigm of geometrical precision, the serial-repetition of grids and the monochromatic tendency where color is treated as an object. But considering the aesthetic tradition under which Sadiq evolved his style and more specifically his guidance under Santosh one cannot possibly assume that he shares the cold-blooded outlook of American minimalists.

At a closer look, which however does not yield much considering the awfully poor quality of the reproduced images, his paintings reflect equally miniscule details of a certain life-activity. In the first painting the pyramid-like two mountain tops and the condensed foreground, which appears like some untamed forest full of trees, brings him closer to the landscape space, a preoccupation which is as much suggestive of the iconic natural landscape of the valley and a certain regional link with his fellow artists who share the similar abstract treatment to landscape.

SURAJ TIKU

Some surprisingly comprehensive accounts from the internet, at the least, are helpful to locate some relevant biographical details about Suraj Tiku. These accounts refer to his early inclination to art when he was hardly a twelve year
old and would pick up a piece of charcoal to draw sparrows on walls. After passing out from Amar Singh Technical institute Suraj started off his career as a landscape painter and also is quite well known for his academic oriented portraits. His landscapes in water color, however, evident in its influence of British academic realism, show certain sophistication from Wali’s rather stiff and opaque treatment. Suraj’s watercolors are reflective of an impressionist delimitation and simplicity. The freshness and the transparency and the minimum use of brush strokes, the conventional watercolor techniques, is so vividly present in these works such as A Street in the winter, (pl.42). While he preferred watercolor for landscapes his portraits and later works are done mostly in oil color.

The various anecdotes reflect upon the fact that he was quite in demand as a portrait painter. From urban elites to mythological portraits of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna his fame as a portrait artist had spread across the state. The life-size portrait of Sheikh Abdullah, the then Chief Minister, for which he was commissioned by the government, is preserved in Sher-i-Kashmir Conference Hall at Soura Institute. Among the other portraits that he painted were of Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. S.N. Ahmed Shah, the renowned physician and Sh. Chaman Lal Churangoo, one of the founders of Kala Kendra theatre in Jammu. In this Suraj shares a certain patriotic passion with Somnath Khosa, however, Suraj’s involvement was primarily confined to display his virtuosity as a portraitist. This needs to be stated that portrait painting was the most convenient form of art that assured instant success both in the elite circles and among the laymen. Santosh is known to have retained this skill throughout his career irrespective of the fact that it hardly contributes in his professional success in the international modern Indian art. There is an interesting anecdote when Santosh encounters one of Suraj’s similar traditional paintings that he could not help to quip in Kashmiri: “Yi Chuh Kamal, Yi Gav
Suraj at the same time reflects a certain distance from the Company School orientation and like his contemporaries ventures into the modernist vocabulary. The painting called Horses, 1965 (pl.43) is a powerful medley of Raza’s gestural expressionist mode and other abstractionists working in impasto. But the characteristic of Suraj’s painting is the horse motif, a metaphor often associated with Husain. Until now we largely get to see the landscape barren or inhabited with architectural motifs. Suraj brings in the zoomed dynamism of horse, which considering the agility and the power-dynamics of this romantically significant animal, convincingly synchronizes the action-oriented abstract expressionist stance. At once reminiscent of William De Kooning in his treatment of the woman-form. However, both differ considerably, while De Kooning was preoccupied with the negative aesthetics to express the gross and the vulgar, Suraj, like a post-romanticist celebrates the dynamism of beauty and power. The other paintings mentioned, possibly done in the similar manner, are Roses, Dongas at Habbakadal, Kanzalvan dated as 1975.

But unlike Santosh, Suraj’s sporadic shifts from one mode to another did not help him to develop a sustained and distinctively original vocabulary. As Triloke Kaul observes: “Tiku's landscape paintings had an edge over those of D N Wali (particularly after 1949) as Tiku was in tune with contemporary trends in art though his base was traditional.”

Suraj’s traditional base, however, outlives the experiments he did in modernist idioms. In 1969 the so-called Visionaries Group was formed by the artist and the faculty members at the Institute of Music and Fine Arts in Srinagar. The idea was to provide an alternative non-governmental platform to promote contemporary art of the state. They tried to initiate discussions and organize exhibitions. Suraj Tiku along with Triloke Kaul, PN Kachru, Gokul Dembi and
others was an active member of the group. After one of its exhibitions in Delhi, in which Suraj also participated, not much is known about the nature of activities and how long it sustained as a group.

Some of Suraj’s paintings are in the collection of J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Language. In the annual programs of J&K Cultural Academy Suraj Tiku was honored with many awards, notably for First Snowfall, 1963-64, Horses, 1965, Roses, 1964, My Land, 1967.

**BANSI PARIMU (1938 – 1991)**

Bansi Parimu, a self-taught artist like Nisar Aziz and Sadiq, is known for his multidimensional persona. People remember him as much as a painter, a sculptor and also an environmentalist. But as an artist, which by principal is inclusive of his other preoccupations, he too followed his fellow artists like Santosh, Triloke Kaul and Kishori Kaul to seek his basic from the immediate and the overwhelming presence of nature in Kashmir. And also the simultaneity and the spasmodic shifts from one idiom to another. From some images floating on internet his early experiments show a drastic sense of contradictory modes often fluctuating between a figurative, very much informed by the typical illustration oriented narrative of Company painting, and on other hand quite bold experiments in the abstract idiom. But it is largely his abstractionist approach that eventually characterizes his body of work.

A broad overview of Bansi Parimu’s use of the abstract vocabulary reveals some significant formalistic preoccupations which mark his approach as somewhat different from his contemporaries. We can notice a concretization of form, which although closer to Santosh, are considerably different from the diffused and the flat treatment of Triloke and Kishori Kaul. Unlike the loaded
and gestural stance of abstract expressionist outlook, Parimu shares more with
the classical formalists like Paul Klee or the Indian abstractionists like,
Gaitonde, Shanti Dev and Jeram Patel. Except the un-geometric and often
referential mode of Parimu’s paintings his compositional arrangement is also
quite close to that of Prabhakar Kolte.

The common paradigm shared by most of the first generation of Kashmiri artists lies in their somewhat evolutionary development where natural forms were subject to a certain abstraction without actually becoming truly abstract. This somewhat queer development brings alive the art-historical memory of Mondrian’s transitional development from the horizontal/vertical structure of a tree form transformed into a pure abstract geometrical order. As for Mondrian, or the Constructivists in general, “the elimination of the real and visible was not an aesthetic requirement but a philosophical tenet.” However, while its futuristic outlook found a concrete utilization in the architectural space of the urban landscape, the mode incorporated by Kashmir abstractionists, or the overall abstract tendency of 60s shared by many other Indian artists, may not have found its relevance in the concrete and the functional public space but rather addresses the personal, the spiritual/metaphysical or pure aesthetical linguistic purposes.

Moreover, the difference from both the utopian dream of Supermatists or Constructivists and the transcendental aims of some representational Indian abstractionists including Santosh, the specific aura of Kashmiri landscape-oriented artists particularly Triloke, Kishori and Bansi Parimu is overwhelmingly suffused with the nostalgic rhapsody or yearnings. From this standpoint we can, hypothetically, imagine that the early formalistic experiments, largely due to the inevitable currents of mainstream influences, subsequently assumed a post-romantic narrative mode after the tragic migration of Kashmiri Pundits in 1990s. Their paintings, in spite of being largely abstract,
seem loaded with a certain narrative that is as much immediate and experiential. A characteristic which is quite vividly direct and representational in the works of Ratan Parimoo but in the case of Bansi Parimu it finds an allegorical symbolism. The work Untitled, 1972 (pl.44) at a glance appears to be a pure display of formalistic engagement with form, color and the compositional order it also is simultaneously evocative of a Hindu ritualistic ambience. While the work done in 1991, so appropriately called Cobwebs of Apathy, (pl.45), is disconcerting in its lacerating guise. A website dedicated to him describes:

The strife in Kashmir and his displacement to Delhi only led to the maturing of his art. Particularly impressive was the manner in which Parimu trapped the whimsical light patterns of the Himalayan pastures, sitting and working furiously (and nostalgically) in a Delhi studio. 28

Bansi Parimu’s artistic evolution shows a relatively sustained engagement and quite active presence in the art related initiatives in the Valley and outside. He had come a long way from the traditional landscapes in watercolor, figurative paintings with a certain provincial engagement with the ethnic character of the life in Kashmir until he settled to work within abstract vocabulary, which gave his body of work a distinctively individualistic outlook. Consciously or subconsciously, like his fellow artist, his thematic concerns were explicitly dominated by the Valley. In its haunting aura the painting Cobwebs of Apathy reminds of such artistic events as Somnath Hore’s Wounds series of 70s and Francis Bacons stylistic achievement to evoke the existential metamorphosis of the human form. However, as a formalistic language Parimu has been quite successful to achieve the desired effect by means of his deft execution. His use of fine gauze overlays to create a calligraphic and arabesque effect which capture the changing pattern of light in the Himalayan pastures became a
certain trademark his paintings were often identified with. His contribution as a sculptor, writer and environmentalist were also significant.

Bansi Parimu was actively involved with the early modern art initiative in the Valley. A brief biographical data published on a website reveals his involvement and achievement:


In the wake of militancy he, like most of the other Kashmiri Pundits, was forced to leave the Valley. This great tragic migration had a discernible influence on his work, which evidences the transformation from the gay romantic representations of lush green waters, Himalayan Mountains and the exhilarating colors to the allegory of homelessness and exile. In 1991, just few years after displacement, he died in Delhi.

**RATAN PARIMOO (1936)**

In the academic life of Baroda during its golden phase Parimoo occupies a very significant position. Parimoo’s special ability to manage relatively two opposing dimensions of artist and a theoretician, which he shared with such intellectual-artists like Bendre, K G Subramanyan and Gulammohammed Sheikh, anticipated his scholarly initiatives to enrich the academic life of Baroda. Basically trained as a painter and the fact he always wanted to be identified as an artist first and then a theorist, his career proved to be somewhat other way round. In 1957 Parimoo did his M.A. in Creative Painting, which was followed with a Post Graduate Diploma in Museology. In 1960 he received a Commonwealth Scholarship to study art history in London. Even before leaving to London he was teaching art history in Baroda, the vocation that engages the best part of his productive life. Parimoo’s most significant contribution is largely based on his academic position as a scholar and theoretician of art.

As a painter his development is marked with the influences of art-historical baggage. His paintings in the bourgeoning phase are saturated with various stylistic appropriations, for instance the calligraphic notations of Jain miniatures or the idiosyncratic use of perspective in miniature paintings or various idioms from western modern art like Fauvism, abstract expressionism,
pop art and more specifically Surrealist self-preoccupation. Parimoo’s indulgence into the traditional Indian vocabulary came by way of Bendre’s demonstrations to teach his students the technique and style of Indian miniature painting, anticipating the pedagogic initiatives of K G Subramanyan to bring in the learning skills and techniques of the living traditions of folk and tribal art into the international modern vocabulary. As described by Dr. Panikkar and Shivaji K: “...in the second half of 1950’s Parimoo devised a two-dimensional pictorial schema, linear draughtsmanship and narrative brevity based on Western Indian Jain painting in his pictorial narrations of remembered Kashmir and lived local environment of Baroda.”

The works like, My Home, 1958, Untitled, 1959, two Untitled paintings of 1963 and Untitled painting of a possibly same period (pl.46,47,48,49 and 50) are explicitly marked with a more than one stylistic vocabulary. The later painting such as Nightmare, 2002 (pl.51) makes a radical departure from the earlier works. The Nightmare recalls the shock and horror of Francisco Goya’s so-called black paintings. However, not so gruesome and hair-raising as the Disaster of Wars engraving series of Goya, which perhaps Parimoo desired to achieve. These frequent transitional modes are briefly but comprehensively analyzed by Richard Bartholomew:

...in such early works as “Habba Kadal”, “Lotus Valley” and “Zoo” we have the approach at its best. But then, Parimoo soon abandons “content” as such, doing away altogether with literal definition. He plunges (a trifle prematurely) into abstraction by mid-1959. In “Arrangement B” the descriptive lines, for instance, have become coiled structures within the simple dynamics established by colour masses. And this gets developed rapidly into a form of gestural abstraction, concentrating ultimately on calligraphic possibilities. The cross-over into the abstract mode is rather tentative, to begin with. The works have tints for background and tints for the Kline-like brushwork. Fortunately, this period of pasteurization and of roseate mists ends, I believe, with the generally rock hard “Black Mountain” of 1967 where two bars of red and green (tin-foil used as collage) explode like fog
The existential event of metamorphosis, so characteristically a common element shared by most of the first generation artists of Kashmir more particularly Kashmiri Pundits, assumes a more direct, deliberate and poignantly representational stance in the works of Ratan Parimoo. The idyllic and the tranquil aura of early 60s landscape-oriented compositions are suddenly invaded by the allegory of desolation. His paintings, no matter in what thematic context or painterly stance, are haunted with a disconcerting sense of fear. Possibly, symptomatic of the existential condition or the general paranoia of a Kashmiri Pundit in the midst of the militancy, his works dwell on the nightmarish and yet unavoidably desperate idea of returning home. As Keshav Malik, a Kashmir born art critic, in his poetic mode of analysis describes:

His is not a pictorial display of dappled or bursting lights, or of easy going rural shapes and images, with colors palpitating in the waters of the Dal Lake, but a space where mirages or nightmares may also occur. Here, then are psychic or brooding annotations. With its somnambulistic and haunted space his city – seen from up top – becomes a stage for a disengaged self-examination or else self-engagement. Thus the borders between solid reality and the dream blur. This art therefore is personal, but in a new meaning of that term. The natural distance between the artist and the environment is abolished. And it has been done so by ignoring all the given features of the environment, and as by dissembling and reconstituting it at will on a plane of the artist’s
own devising – by turning his back on outward reality altogether to find vistas and distances within the expanses of the self alone. The art thereby stands as a manifestation of psychological reality – as of vitality, or a reality, capable of establishing a suspenseful relationship between the individual and his uneasy surroundings and through which the individual extends himself, claiming his place in the scheme of things, or confronting his fate.\footnote{34}

Parimoo’s most representational body of work is informed by his characteristic use of surreal vocabulary to confess his autobiographical concerns. This preoccupation with the self, which recurs throughout his artistic career, is marked with a certain distinction if we compare his discernibly narrative mode with the abstract-orientation of his fellow artists like Triloke, Santosh and Bansi Parimu. While he does share the transitional mode of his development with his Kashmiri contemporaries but unlike most of them his greater chunk of latter work comes as a loaded narrative. This needs to be stated that the return of narrative as a Baroda initiative is best understood as a shift in paradigm to launch an aesthetic and ideological resistance to the imperialist undercurrents of formalistic vocabulary of Progressives and non-referential/non-objective abstraction.

The most recent work takes us into yet another level of Parimoo’s kaleidoscopic artistic career punctured with unpredictable development. The autobiographical preoccupation annotated with art-historical or popular culture appropriations assumes a profoundly idiosyncratic stance in the works like \textit{Nayika as Botticelli’s Venus}, 2001 -2006, \textit{Nayika as Maharani} 2002 -2007, \textit{Aishwarya as Mona Lisa}, 2003 -2007, \textit{Nayika as Kishangarh Bani Thani}, 2004, \textit{Nayika as Venus De Melos}, \textit{Nayika as Umrao Jan}, 2006, 2007 (pl.52,53,54,55,56 and 57). The calendar-like representation while recalling the art of Ravi Verma, who was subject to severe criticism in the ideology of Progressives found a sudden come back among the Baroda art-intelligentsia and was celebrated as an earliest exponent of Indian modern painter. On the
other end his appropriationist mode aligns him with the conceptual standpoint shared by artists like Atul Dodiya; however, the latter is more firmly grounded in the postmodernist framework.

Besides a celebrated position of one of the major art-critic and art-historian of India, Parimoo has shown a rigorously sustained engagement as an artist. Like some of the other artists of his generation his relatively active participation in the art events has spared him the fate of obscurity. But obscurity can sometimes come as blessing in disguise. While his art-scholarly contribution is undisputedly acknowledged but his artistic position has does not share the similar recognition.

**MANOHAR KAUL** (1925 - 1999)

Manohar Kaul shares common multidimensional persons with Ratan Parimoo for engaging both as a painter and a writer. During the heyday of modern art initiatives in the Valley, the 50s and 60s, he was already writing on various aspects of ancient, medieval and modern cultural and aesthetic concerns. Actively involved with the cultural concerns of the time his writings on art has a characteristic scholarly flavor as he never discussed contemporary art in isolation of the ancient or traditional past. From his point of view no great art of today can emerge without some debt to the arts of the ancient. That is why in his writings on modern art trends we get so see many references to Ancient, Folk, Mughal, Pahari and Rajasthani traditions.

With such a well-meaning individualistic stand, not shared by many who saw modernist experiments in art as an ahistorical phenomena, his dual vocation as an artist and art critic earned him a special recognition to be possibly the first writer to reflect upon the modern art of the Valley, especially during its early
phase in 50s and 60s. Manohar Kaul has also served as a president and a chairman of AIFAC in Delhi, a very important administrative position not shared by many artist of the Valley. Among his recent contributions as a promoter of modern art is the art journal Kala Darshan, which he launched single-handedly.

As a painter Manohar Kaul’s journey also starts from the Amar Singh Technical Institute in Srinagar. His Mountain-scapes, for which he is commonly associated with, owes its basic orientation to British academic training. But it is influence of the charismatic Russian philosopher, traveler and painter Nicholas Roerich (1874 – 1947), who is known for his extensive tours to Kashmir during 1925-1926, that Manohar’s paintings seem to be enmeshed with. Roerich, whose paintings of later phase dwell in the spiritual aura of Himalayan beauty, has painted such sumptuously poetic landscapes of Kashmir as the famous Sunset- Kashmir, 1943. The intuitive color tonalities, which he achieved after many layers of paint, and the preference for a darker contrast, exude a sense of metaphysical tranquilly in the landscapes of Roerich. Manohar’s landscapes evoke the similar ambience, however, the former reflects a far more refined and erudite aesthetic vocabulary as compared to the sketchy watercolors of Manohar.

The most significant feature of Manohar Kaul’s artistic career is that he, unlike his fellow artist, does not indulge into the nostalgic or allude to the pangs of exile. His work, on the contrary, is suggestive of a certain yogic experience of serenity and mediation. Closer to Triloke Kaul, he provides an alternative aesthetic which, unlike to most of the Kashmir Pundit artists, celebrate in the positive dimension of human history. Ratnottama Sen Gupta, an art editor for the daily newspaper The Times of India, on her visit to a recent show of Kaul’s paintings at AIFACS New Delhi, describes:
Viewing the series at AIFACS, you may wonder why you trace no note of nostalgia, no tint of sadness in the exhibits. That, you may say, would be natural for one who roamed the valley when it was green. Now that it is pillaged and pained, should not the sensitivity of an artist's soul resonate the trauma that rents the milieu? No, asserts Kaul: that's the burden of a reporter, an illustrator. "I cannot show a man killing another man," he pleads. But if he cannot show that, he can certainly depict the dream that is sure to dissolve in the harsh reality of destruction. "Also," Kaul hopes, "if people see how beautiful Kashmir is, their desire to retain it will be strengthened."  

Kaul, however, remotely recalls the shamanic position of the famous German conceptual artist Joseph Beuys who believed that his artistic mission was to heal the wounds caused by the world wars. While Beuys' performances are informed by the post-60 shifts in paradigm where new concerns like artists' body as medium and the element of maximum interactivity between the artist and the onlooker were shaping a radical revolution in the discourse of art. Kaul on the hand, however like a traditional modernist, talks about the therapeutic value of his paintings. Referring to Faber Birren, (1900 1988), a color psychologist who is widely known for his hypothetical theories dealing with the scientific and psychological significance of color and its association with human emotions, Kaul wanted to base his ambitious aesthetic approach. The works like (pl.58, 59 and 60) are as much informed by the Birren's ideas about the color as they are reflective of Roerich's intuitive aura.

But while the Roerich dwells into the sublime and the vast space Kaul's vision zooms in the myriad symphony of nature's sumptuous imagery. The shimmering sparkling shafts of lightening protruding out of the dark sky; the earthly rocks as a dynamic contrast to the floating clouds; the moon and the mountain bathed in silver reciprocation; the flower-laden tree caught dancing in the silent night; the narcissistic stance of the moony-sky watching itself in a
pond; are rich poetic metaphors occupying the landscapes like (pl.61,62 and 63).

One may imagine that Kaul, like Beuys, sought a therapeutic aim in his aesthetic language to work as a healing touch for the bruised and the bereaved victims of the militancy in Kashmir. But Kaul, in his position as a theorist who was always at ease to articulate his artistic concerns, does not refer to the greater tragedy and instead seems more focused on the clinical aspect of art-therapy to deal the immediate physical ailments. While talking about his recent work he writes:

Some landscapes I present are in fact based on the colour therapy which can play an important role in helping to cure many disabilities. Therefore the presentation is a combination of aesthetic values as well as the curative powers of colours.

As we can deduce from his peaceful personality and the fact he thoroughly maintained a certain distance to load his art with the tragic and the mournful it becomes quite obvious that he was more concerned with the immediate and the present. Showing a relatively active involvement as a writer and an art patron his paintings, however, did not see much presence in the Indian art scene. However, after a gap of some two decades since his first show in fifties a retrospective show covering almost thirty years was held in 1983 after which he never really gave up the brush until his death in 1999 in Delhi.

The other artist often mentioned along with the first generation of Kashmir’s modern artists is Mohan Raina (1928 - 1987). Born to a drawing teacher Pandit Shiv Raina, Raina learnt his early lessons from his father. Riana’s fame is generally centered on an interesting anecdote when in early 50s an emblem competition was organized by the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly. After the competition the designs were submitted to the committee headed by
Sheikh Abdullah who was very much impressed by Riana’s design, which eventually became the Committee’s emblem. This recognition among the elites secured his position as an exhibition officer in the Information Department.38

Ghulam Rasool Santosh (1929 – 1997), who occupies almost one-third of the present study, remains to be the only Kashmiri artist who is internationally celebrated for his outstanding contribution to Indian modern art. His distinctively original and significantly individualistic work has placed him in the forefront of Indian modernism, especially, during its most crucial and crisis-ridden phase. It is largely due to his discovery of Tantrism that opened a vista of opportunities for his artistic development. Driven by the urge to seek a certain vocabulary for his artistic expression he choose to settle on an idiom what came to be known as Neo–Tantric. The term Tantric, basically an ancient religio-philosophical cult involving a ritualistic association with symbolic geometric and abstract diagrams came into prominence in 1960s. The influence of Tantra and its concepts of vital force operating in all living beings had a far reaching resonance and fascination, which could be traced in the pioneer abstract painters, particularly the circle of Kasimir Malevich. But its influence was widely felt when in 1960s the art historian Ajit Mukherjee’s besides publishing the book Tantra Art in 1967 brought a historic exhibition of Tantra art in the West. Since abstraction was in the vogue the Tantric abstract imagery became one of the possibilities to seek inspiration from.39

However, the affinities between traditional Tantric imagery and modern non-figurative abstraction have been subject to doubt and skepticism. Among the artists who came to be identified or referred as or associated with the Neo-Tantric are, G .R. Santosh, Biren De and K. C. Paniker. They were followed by other artist like Jagdish Swaminathan, Shankar Palsikar, S H Raza, Haridasan,
Om Prakash and Prafulla Mohant. Drawing its sources from the abstract Tantric symbolism primarily based on the concept of primordial union of Purusha and Prakriti Neo-Tantric stylization was shared by many Indian artists as a safe aesthetic investment. Biren De’s switchover from figurative to abstraction brought his work closer to the Tantric diagrams, who is often described as the first truly Neotantric artist. Paniker’s incorporation of authentically indigenous traditional sources as an alternative to the western abstraction is generally considered to be the earliest initiatives in the tantric direction. However, Paniker later maintained a certain deliberate distance because of its religious resonance. Raza and Swaminathan shared a somewhat similar position. For instance, their preoccupation with the tantric symbolism on the one hand and a distanced and disinterested aim to explore pure plastic and formal order on the other. For Santosh, on the contrary, the neo-Tantric paradigm was as much an aesthetic solution to outlive the binary opposition between abstraction and representation and at the same time the existential choice to identify with the spiritual value-system of the ancient wisdom. His simplified images of male and female in sexual union with dramatic light and dark effects are suggestive of an esoteric numinous dimension implicit in Tantric designs. As Ratan Parimoo points out: “The original Tantric diagrams are actually aids to meditation or visual symbolization in geometrical configuration of complex philosophical concepts.” In this context even S. H. Raza’s *Bindu* or *Ma* paintings of the late 1970s incorporate a language based on geometric diagrams to embody the concept of meditation. Among these Santosh embodies a sustained and longest engagement with the Neo-Tantric aesthetics. Interestingly, these abstract-oriented initiatives of the Indian artists were, formalistically, contemporaneous to American hard-edge abstraction, which lent a certain validation to this specific trend from an international point of view.40
This aspect of seeking and appropriating the esoteric and transcendental abstract imagery from ancient classical/traditional sources of India with the international conventions of non-objective/abstraction is also of great significance in the context of second generation modern art scene in Kashmir. For instance, the Baroda trained Gayoor Hassan and his student Shujah Sultan, discussed in the third chapter, also traverse along the numinous terrain of transcendental and meditative aesthetic formulas. Considering the scale of Santosh’s body of work and the dense conceptual/aesthetic concerns a comprehensive discussion is followed in the next chapter.
Footnotes


8. Lalit Kala Contemporary – 34, January 1987, pp 73-74


13. Ibid., Notes, p 269


17. Mago, Pran Nath, *Contemporary Art in India – A Perspective*, p 111

18. Ibid., 114


25. Ibid.,

26. Ibid.,


29. Ibid.,


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CHAPTER II

INCEPTION OF MODERN ART IN KASHMIR
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