

# 6

## Summary and Conclusion

### 6.1 Summary

The first chapter is an introduction to the framework of the study. Abstract art in the modern context emerged during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a completely new way of looking and approaching the domain of art. It went completely against the prevailing academic style of realistic representation of the subjects which adhered strictly to the age old tradition of imitation. This would in fact change with the coming of the precursors to 20<sup>th</sup> century modern art such as Impressionism, where artists for the first time, abandoned the smooth and detailed finish of a complete painting. Instead it was now replaced by visible brushstrokes rendering a sketchy feel to the paintings. However, the works of this time were still representational in nature, and later developments witnessed the post-Impressionist who broke through the limitations of Impressionism and later on the development of other avant-garde movements such as Fauvism, Expressionism and Cubism paved the way towards pure abstraction.

African art also started to play a significant role in early 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde movements. Kandinsky, Mondrian and Malevich emerged as the pioneers of pure abstraction. Their works would also have profound influences on the post-Independence Indian artists such as V.S. Gaitonde, K.C.S. Paniker, Ram Kumar, Laxman Shreshtha and Prabhakar Kolte. Not only the Western influences, but these artists also absorbed the Indian spirit and culture embracing their own indigenous identities to create a unique approach to abstraction. Exploring and analyzing such vast and dynamic body of works requires the combined viewpoints of theories and philosophies of both India and the West.

The second chapter elaborates on Western history of art and relevant art and aesthetics theories. Art and aesthetics theories have evolved over the course of the years. Imitation and its accompanying theories came to be one of the first and major approaches towards the appreciation and evaluation of art. However, doctrines of imitation would prove to be limited while studying the pure abstraction of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art. But this does not in any way make the imitation theory any less significant while trying to understand the nature of abstraction in 20<sup>th</sup> century art. In the modern context, what was once understood as “imitation” came to be understood as “expression”. Although some of the more abstract art-forms such as music were considered as an imitation or representation of our feelings and emotions according to the Greek imitation theory, however, taking into account the more recent expression theories, it would be considered not as imitation or representation, but, rather expression. This new way of looking at art was supported by thinkers such as Croce.

The long held sway of Classical art, Renaissance art and other traditions which adhere to academic realism which were limited by the principles of anatomy and idealistic representations would come to an end by the turn of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Art being just mere photographic imitation was very limited, mundane and inartistic and did not agree with many of the modern principles of both the East and the West with significant figures such as Hegel, Croce, Coomaraswamy, Rabindranath and Abanindranth Tagore.

While studying the Indian philosophy and principles of art, it is found that the Indian approach to art and aesthetics has always been a distant from the imitation of the crass matter which was so prevalent in much of Western history of art and aesthetics. Giving more emphasis on the symbolic, spiritual and transcendental elements of a work of art, Indian principles of aesthetics never succumbed to the copying of external elements and considered them as '*maya*' which is the Sanskrit word for illusion. However, this is not to say that Indian art avoided the usage of figurative elements altogether. Coomaraswamy emphasizes on the usage of figurative elements in Indian art, not for the purpose of representing the phenomenal world, but deeper symbolism behind certain hand gestures and bodily movements.

Principles of Formalism also became a prominent theory of art during the 20<sup>th</sup> century Western context with critics such as Fry and Bell. Having its foundational roots from the aesthetic principles of philosophers such as Kant, Formalism becomes an

indispensable tool for approaching much of the artworks of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century where major emphases were given on the purely formal properties of the works such as color and pattern.

Tracing the trajectory of the development of abstraction in post-independence India, the factors which includes influences from various different contexts from both Western and indigenous sources becomes pivotal in studying it. Avant-garde movements such as Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Expressionism, and Cubism paved the path towards the development of pure abstraction. The experimentation with colors, forms and expressionistic values started with the Post-Impressionists, whose legacy were carried further on by later developments such as Fauvism, Expressionism and Cubism. This phase in the development of modern art had profound influences from the African tribal art where, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Western artists were much intrigued by the geometrical simplicity of the forms and the expressionistic qualities that the abstracted forms of this art renders. During this time, art had become more and more abstract, where the formal properties such as exaggerated colors were given primary importance.

The emergence of the first pure abstract art was spearheaded by artists such as Kandinsky, Mondrian, and Malevich. At this point, there was a complete rejection of figurative elements and a breakaway from representational art. Taking into account the formal qualities of the works of the pure abstractionists, independent free flowing colors and patterns became the dominating factors in the works. Geometrical shapes such as circles, squares and rectangles became the main elements in their works. During this phase, while digging deeper into their motives, and doctrines, one can find significant influences of Eastern spiritualism in their works. This Eastern ‘spiritualism’ paved the way for them in their search for the higher underlying truths of the universe. Eastern spiritualism was introduced in the West through Theosophy and it would have profound influences on the Western artists and thinkers of that time. Tantra art and some of its visual properties such as the diagram of the Shri Yantra aided the Western pioneers of pure abstraction by providing the formal properties in their quest for spiritualism and the underlying truths. The geometrical properties of such diagrams aided them profoundly. Therefore, it is not surprising that many post-independence Indian abstract artists found identification with their Western counterparts in their search for their own abstract expressions, while simultaneously, getting back to their Indian roots.

The third chapter discusses various trends of Indian aesthetics and particularly the developments of 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian art. Color was a major driving force in the language of the abstractionists, both in India and the West. Color symbolism is a comparatively less studied area in the history of art. However, in the kind of painting where freely existing color takes precedence over figurative and representational elements, the inner working of the properties of different colors and the interplay between them, the psychological and emotional effect it can have on the viewer becomes pivotal. Therefore, it is not surprising that in his quest for the spiritualism in art, Kandinsky gave major emphasis on color. Not only in the Western context, but, color also found its significance in Indian aesthetic principles in the *Rasa* theory where various *rasas* along with their *bhavas* are assigned their own particular colors.

The developments during pre-independence 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian art also played a huge part in shaping the art of the post-independence era. From rejecting the British academic realism to getting back to their Indian roots, the artists of this phase acted as a bridge between the old and the new. During this time, the Indian art scene has witnessed the likes of artists such as Abanindranath Tagore, Jamini Roy, Amrita Sher-Gil, etc. Later developments in Indian art during the post-independence era witnessed artists such as G.R. Santosh, J. Swaminathan, and later the Progressive artists group with prominent artists such as S.H. Raza and M.F. Hussain. Along with the establishment of these artists, the Indian art scene was now set to develop further.

The fourth chapter studies and analyzes the works of Post-Independence Indian abstractionists, V.S. Gaitonde, Ram Kumar and Laxman Shreshtha. The paintings of these said artists demands a comparatively more spiritually contemplative response from the viewers. Photographic imitation and representation is still obsolete while taking their works into consideration. It is true that Gaitonde, Ram Kumar and Shreshtha's works are a derivative of the phenomenal world such as landscapes, the sea, sky, mountains as such but, it would be too much of a misapprehension to state that they are the simplified or distorted version of these elements from the phenomenal world. The artists' intuition becomes a major factor while observing such works. Their abstract 'landscape-like' paintings are not mere distorted and simplified expressive version of actual landscapes but a manifestation of the underlying truths and revelations brought forth by the interplay of free-flowing colors and patterns. This is comparatively very similar to the works of the 20<sup>th</sup> Western artists such as Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich, and Klee. The Indian artists

however, found such similar revelations in getting back to their roots. Such conditions are not surprising because the Western pioneers of abstract art owe it much to Indian spiritualism in achieving the magnum opus in the course of their journey towards non-objective art.

While observing the works of abstract artists such as Gaitonde, intuition plays a huge role in the comprehension of the unknown. Such intuition finds solid manifestation in non-verbal mode of expression such as color and pattern. The whole process corresponds to what Croce describes as “intuition-expression”. Intuition plays a huge role with not just abstract artists but artists in general (even the common man), however, when it comes a work of art made entirely of non-representational abstract elements such as free flowing colors and shapes, the conventional laws of the phenomenal world is abandoned, there is a profound reliance of the artist’s own intuitive vision, rather than relying on the empirical experience of the physical world.

Unlike artists like Kolte whose emphasis was more on the manifestation of pure forms, Ram Kumar finds attachments to the spiritual revelations of the phenomenal world (the cityscape) around him. Furthermore, by distorting and simplifying these structures into highly abstracted motifs and with the aid of the unnatural somber and monochromatic tone, the paintings reveal to the spectators, the very emotions of the human condition that the artist felt while observing the city. This process would be what the expression theory of art suggests as the communication of feelings and emotions through a work of art by figures such as Tolstoy and Croce.

However, it is insufficient not to take into consideration, the representational aspects of Ram Kumar’s abstract. From the Greek mimesis point of view, not only is it representational of human emotions, but the clear and distinct usage of the city landscape in an abstracted manner retains some of the principles of representational art. For Ram Kumar, his abstract landscapes are not just holding a mirror to the phenomenal world, something which were heavily critiqued by Aristotle, Coomaraswamy and Tagore while dealing with art and aesthetics.

However, representational it may be, the color schemes and the expressive and unnatural vibrant tones, along with the background knowledge behind the subject matter of the painting aids the viewer in feeling and identifying himself with the same emotions that the artist had infused in his work.

Hegel's view that the painting of a natural object as the proper object of contemplation and not the actual object itself becomes relevant while observing Ram Kumar's paintings. The Benaras cityscape as itself is just a structure of buildings and landscapes. However, through the artistic vision of Ram Kumar, the landscape is transformed into an object of human emotions worthy of human attention and speculative contemplation. As in Hegel's view that through art, the natural object processed in an aesthetic manner, the object becomes suffused with human emotions. Furthermore, the distortion and abstraction that he has introduced in the representation of the cityscape along with his abandonment of human figures in order to convey human emotions also corresponds with what Hegel states about man's endeavor for seeking less and less sensible or representational images in order to understand themselves better.

Much like in Ram Kumar's work, Shreshtha's canvas is reminiscent of landscapes, and skies of some unknown realm. The subtleties and serenity observed in the 60s work of Gaitonde could also be seen in Shreshtha's canvas. Music being an essential part of his painting process is similar to that of Western modern artists such as Klee and Kandinsky for whom the rhythm of music played pivotal role in their composition of color on the picture plane. And like music, the painting lean towards a specific mood which is evocative of emotion rather than intellect. Throughout various publications, abstract art has been compared to the visual equivalent of music which is abstracted from space and conceives with time which according to Hegel is more ideal than space. Assignment of colors in the various *rasas* of Indian aesthetics in the evocation of emotion through colors is also relevant in this context, although color symbolism and evocation of a specific emotion through a particular color is a very subjective topic and differs from person to person.

Shreshtha's earlier influence from Impressionism also seems to reflect in his abstract work. Unlike the abstract landscapes of Ram Kumar and the landscape-like abstracts of Gaitonde, Shreshtha's works seem to manifest a subtle play of light or illumination on the abstract structures.

In many ways, his works have a similar pattern with that of Ram Kumar, where distortion begins from the objects in the nature. The painting does not fully give in to either representation or abstraction for the sake of abstraction. The rhythm of the colors and subtle patterns in his landscape-like structures reflects his own intuitive visions and

emotions just like the rhythm of music expresses the musician's emotions and evokes the same level of emotional experience in his landscape-like structures reflects his own intuitive visions and emotions just like the rhythm of music expresses the musician's emotions and evokes the same level of emotional experience in the listener as well.

The fifth chapter studies and analyzes the abstract paintings of K.C.S Paniker and Prabhakar Kolte. Abstraction in visual arts such as painting has unique and peculiar approaches from various artists. The one thing common to abstract artists is their avoidance of using recognizable and representational forms which are seen in nature. Sometimes physical objects in nature are distorted and simplified into expressive colors and patterns, and sometimes with artists such as Paniker and Kolte, pure independent forms play a major role in their works. Independent and void of any sort of representation, the forms stand as an end in itself.

Even before his venture into pure abstraction with *Words and Symbols*, Paniker's profound influences from the leading figures of Western modern art such as Gauguin, Matisse, Van Gogh and the Fauves, whose primary concern was with color and abstracted forms makes it necessary to analyze his work from the perspective of the Western aesthetic views and art theories as well.

Paniker, even though, he is well aware of the international traditions of art and influences from the West during his time, he was also conscious of the beauty of his own country's indigenous visuals such as that of the decaying old parchments of ancient texts which reflected to him the significance of his own country's culture and teachings. However, for him, it seems the usage of such visuals was not a deliberate means to voice a nationalist revival for the 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian art scenario, but rather an interest in the aesthetic qualities of the ancient texts and scripts. Even though he has made use of human and animal figures in some of his works, it is not an attempt at the crude imitation of the physical world but rather an engrossment with the formal properties of the distorted figures which supposedly provides a diagrammatic aid to the indecipherable texts.

Paniker's interest is significantly towards the visual aspects of the forms in the ancient texts and mathematical symbols. The illegibility of the texts confirms that his intention was never to communicate an idea or to represent a narrative of certain historical past that are in anyway religious, political, social or nationalist centric. His fascination with mathematical symbols such as the 'zero' and 'infinity' further reveals his

interest in a universal language which does not limit itself to one particular culture. Such fascination with the universality of mathematics can also be found in the works of Western artists such as Mondrian, whose geometrical abstract works made of grids and boxes were a representation of the underlying mathematical principles of the universe. Furthermore, the paintings do not seek the benefits that actual charts of a scientific discovery or a mathematical equation does. Thus, Paniker's interest leans towards a disinterested appeal solely towards the aesthetic properties of the ancient texts and mathematical symbols. Furthermore, since it is already established that his usage of such scripts is not nationalist centered like the Bengal school artists, it is clear that he does not specifically have any social or political agendas propagated through his artwork. His approach corresponds to the theories of art being autonomously existing as itself, finding beauty in its own independent existence which makes it significantly profound as observed in a formalist sphere.

Paniker's approach to abstraction grants the forms and structures in his painting complete liberty from any sort of representation, extraneous function and purpose. Such emphases on pure forms were also observed in works of artists such as Malevich in which the forms exist completely as an end in itself. Although emphasis on the formal aspects such as structures and color were also observed with artists such as Cezanne, it is only with pure abstract artists such as Paniker that one can observe a complete liberation from any sort of representation. Although, the forms were derived from actual scripts such as Malayalam, its illegibility liberates it from any sort of content.

Regarding the emphases on forms and contents in Kolte's work, a similar pattern between him and Paniker could be observed. Both of these artists have paid special attention to the formal compositions of color and pattern. While Paniker achieved this with indecipherable and illegible scripts and symbols, Kolte has made use mainly of large swashes of color which are fully abstracted and non-representational of anything other than itself.

Kolte's approach makes the theory of mimesis and representation or selective representation of the ideal completely obsolete. There is no attempt to recreate anything that nature has already created whether it be sensuous elements of nature such as human figures, animal figures and landscapes or even the super-sensuous elements such as feelings of pain, anger, humor, etc. which was much prevalent in much of Western art



before the advent of modernism. Rather, the form seems to be a manifestation of his innermost quest for freedom of creation just as nature creates. However, besides the usage of pure forms, Kolte seems to be more spiritually involved with with his inner intuition more than Paniker. Kolte's ventures in such unknown realms made of color and patterns are also reminiscent of Klee's work whose usage of geometric forms and bright colors are characteristic of a child's drawing as can be seen his work such as *Castle and Sun*. A similar characteristic of contemplation with one own intuitive thoughts, ideas and imagination could be observed in Kolte's work.

The autonomous nature of his work is cohesive with Kant's theory of appreciating an object of beauty in the *Critique of Judgment* as disinterested pleasure. Devoid of any rules, regulations and methods, it does not serve any social and moral obligations. There is no doubt that Kolte has given much emphasis on the formal play of color and patterns, but still it is hard to perceive it solely from a formalist perspective alone. For him, much like his Western counterparts such as Kandinsky, his endeavor seems to be the venture and search for the higher underlying truths of the phenomenal world. A kind of beauty and revelation which is concealed in nature. The Hegelian notion of placing the forms in art higher and more real than that of the forms in nature could be observed when one studies the work of such abstract artists, even though Hegel was way ahead of their time. Such views also find identification with Coomaraswamy's principles where nature remains as a veil, not a revelation and by extent art is a manifestation of what lies beyond that.

Kolte's approach to abstraction and his identification with nature and how nature creates her forms reflects his own interests and venture into the spiritual in art. Unlike Paniker, whose interest was solely on the formal properties of scripts and symbols, Kolte's abstracts has more to do with what Coomaraswamy calls the "inwardization" of the visual images which bears the mark of spiritual discovery. As Coomaraswamy also states that the artist seeing the image through his mind's eye and to manifest it in solid form through line and color is much relevant in this context. When one strips away the physical form that constitutes the phenomenal world, all that is left is the essence of the things, the spirit. And to solidify such abstract vision and concept in concrete form, the artist is now left with only freely existing colors and patterns which exist wholly independent and pure.

The sixth chapter analyses about the research findings, conclusions and suggestions for further research,

## **6.2 Conclusion**

The discussion concludes with the analysis that while critically studying the works of the post-independence Indian abstract artists, it is not possible to fully comprehend the nature of abstraction in their works without going back to their Western roots. When one takes into account, the Western roots, it is important to note that the Western roots of abstraction had taken major influences of Indian spiritualism. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Indian abstract artists found identification with their Western counterparts. The interplay of non-representational pure colors and forms posed a big opposition to the earlier Greek philosophical viewpoint on art and aesthetics as primarily 'imitation'. Although 20<sup>th</sup> century modern art and abstraction was after their time, the philosophies of figures such as Kant and Hegel regarding aesthetics became relevant. Significant theories such as the formalist criticism with figures such as Bell and Fry owe it much to the theories of Kant in their development. Formalism as a theory also stands with much complete opposition to imitation and representational values of a work of art. Therefore, as a theory it plays a huge role in the appreciation of distorted and simplified images and pure abstraction where major emphasis is given on color and form. However, it would be also be fallacious to only take a strictly formalist approach to all abstract art. Thereby, the theory of Hegel provides a more content-based approach to the works.

While Gaitonde, Kumar and Shreshtha's approach dives towards a more deeper spiritual journey and discovery of the human mind and nature, Paniker and Kolte's approach is mainly an involvement with the aesthetic properties of independent pure colors and forms. Their approach to art also corresponds with the various Western and Indian philosophers that came before their time. Expression theories also served as a significant alternative to the imitation and representation theory. The expression theory was also grounded by various significant thinkers and writers such as Veron, Tolstoy and Croce among whom; Croce emerged as the leading figure. The expression theory provided more grounds beyond the boundaries of what was once considered as imitation and representation. This was also very significant in a time and era where works of art were becoming more and more distorted and expressive and gestural in nature, rather than being plain imitative and representational.

Besides the Western theories of art and aesthetics, the Indian thinkers such as Coomaraswamy and the Tagores also marked a clear domain for art and never allotted a place for plain imitation and representation in their aesthetical philosophies. Instead, they too, like some of their Western counterparts gave prominence to expression, instead of imitation and representation. The attainment of spiritualism also plays a big part in their view of art and aesthetics. These viewpoints are shared by the post-independence Indian abstract artists, as one can observe in the manifesto of their works.

### **6.3 Suggestion for Further Research**

Due to the limitations of time and resources, the research for many other prominent Indian abstract artists could not be conducted. Abstraction was the most profound hallmark of modernism, and it continues to be so even in the post-modernist era in world art or in the Indian context. Most of the post-independence Indian artists found their magnum opus through abstraction by the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The domains of abstraction, its comprehension and understanding can be further explored through the more recent post-modernist theories. Many a new generation of artists and viewers alike tend to have misconceptions on the principles and approach towards abstract art. These misconceptions can be straightened through looking at other trends in post-modernism and how art has evolved to this very day. According to how much visual art has changed in the past few decades, with the coming of other forms of visual art such as installations, performance art, assemblage art, video art and such, one can wonder how much these developments affect the significance of abstract art in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the post-modernist era.

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