

3

History of Modern Indian Art and Aesthetics

3.1 Significance of *Rasa* in Indian Art

Besides the Western context on the emphasis on color in modern art, Indian art and aesthetics was not new to the symbolism of color and the various feelings and moods it can arouse. *Rasa* theory incorporates the idea of color and how specific color can be used as the correspondence for various expression and moods. Indian art undoubtedly has religious intentions and metaphysical aims. However it is not a subordinate for religion and metaphysics. It belongs to the domain of dance, poetry, drama, which communicates the various moods and emotions of man. The poet, painter or sculptor do not express but rather suggests. That suggestion is the very core of artistic rendition which is stressed by the classical Indian theory of *Dhvani* which was laid down by Anandavardhana. The major difference of Indian art to that of the European would be that, European art is more concerned with defining and perfecting finite forms and physical appearances and depicts external phenomena. However, on the other hand, Indian art, combined with Indian myth and legend by which it constantly finds inspiration, suggests rather depicting inner visions and experiences [216].

Bharata in his *Natyasastra* summarizes the theory of image making that all is fruitless, the recital of formulae, the counting of beads, discipline and devotions unless one has achieved the knowledge of color scheme and the hue and properties of the image. The *Sadhanamala* which specifies the iconography and formulas of Buddhist meditation states that the color of the deity should be varied according to the aim of worship [217]. Mukerjee, in his paper, stated about the representation and symbolism of specific color

according to Buddhist iconography. For example, yellow or white for pure meditation, yellow for protection, blue for striking fear, and colors such as red, green, yellow for the conversion. Goddess Tara of Mahayana Buddhism who is a symbol of enlightenment is “white and green when she is contemplative, kind and calm; red, blue and yellow when she is furious and destructive”. The color system in Indian art changes in accordance with the *rasa* that is governing the psychic make-up of the image [218].

Rasa takes up a pivotal role in Indian art, most importantly performing arts. It contains the very core values for a successful dance or dramatic performance. Bharata Munni’s *Natyashastra* is the oldest known disquisition regarding the theory of *rasa*. *Rasa* signifies the primary mental state and the governing emotional response of a work of art or the particular feeling that is induced in the spectator, when they view, hear or read such a piece. It refers to the emotional disposition that is bestowed upon a work of art by the artists, and in turn is received and contemplated on by the spectator. *Rasa* is about the human state of mind. It stresses and takes into consideration about what the mind feels and comprehends and the expression of that feeling thereafter. Expressing the meaning of a song through hand and bodily gestures is called *Abhinaya*, whereas expressing the meaning of a song through facial expression is termed as *Bhava*. *Rasa* is the essence of *Bhava*. According to the *Natyashastra*, the experience of *rasa* is evoked from the audience through the facial expressions and gestures of the performer. These expressions or gestures which are termed as *Bhava*, when relished by the mind of the spectators are called *rasa* [219].

In many of our Indian art such as paintings and sculptures, one can get the essence of various *rasas*. Such as in the Ajanta painting of *Bodhisattva Padmapani* [Plate 3.1] where the expression of the subject is in complete peace and meditative charm which evokes a deep sense of the *Shanta rasa* which is the *rasa* of peacefulness. The erotic sculptures of Khajuraho where the nude figures are involved in intimate activities with one another gives the spectator a profound sense of the *Sringara rasa* which is *rasa* of love [Plate 3.2].

However, in the painting of 20th century female artists such as Sher-Gil, the nude female figures evoke a comparatively different *rasa* such as in the painting of *Nude Group* [Plate 3.3]. Instead of evoking the feeling of attraction and eroticism, Sher-Gil’s

dark and somber color scheme renders the painting the sadness and dark side of womanhood which is evocative of the *Karuna rasa* which is the *rasa* of sorrow [220].

The various *rasa* has also been their own corresponding moods or emotions along with colors representing these emotions. Bharata Munni established such relation between *rasa* and color as such: *Sringara* which is the *rasa* of love and delight is assigned blue; *Haasya* which is the *rasa* of laughter and comedy is assigned the white color; *Karuna* which is the *rasa* of sorrow and mercy is assigned the grey color; *Raudra* which is the *rasa* of fury and anger is assigned the red color; *Veera* which is the *rasa* of heroism is assigned the orange color; *Bhayanaka* which is the *rasa* of horror, terror and fear is assigned the black color; *Bibhatsa* which is the *rasa* of disgust is assigned the blue color; *Adbhuta* which is the *rasa* of wonder and amazement is assigned the yellow color [221].

Color symbolism in general is comparatively quite a subjective domain. Many different cultures have different interpretation of a particular color. For example, in Western culture, people wear black suits and dresses during a funeral mass as the color for mourning, whereas in eastern culture such as in India, people wear white, which is the complete opposite of black as a symbol of mourning. There is no concrete universally assigned mood or emotion to one particular color. That particular color which may be pleasant for some people may not be as pleasant, in fact repulsive for some people.

3.2 A Study of Indian Art from the Aesthetic Principles of A.K. Coomaraswamy, Rabindranath Tagore and Abanindranath Tagore

Both the Indian and the Western art context have witnessed a fair amount of prominent thinkers and theoreticians. The Western aesthetics is led on by Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle and later on with other prominent figures such as Kant, Hegel and Croce. Their theories are also carried on further by various historians, critics and theoreticians by applying them to the principles of the works of art of their time. Indian art and aesthetics also has its own peculiar and unique approach which prompted the attention prominent figures such as Bharata Munni all the way to 19th century philosophers such as Rabindranath Tagore and Ceylonese metaphysician and philosopher of Indian art, A.K. Coomaraswamy. Among the various forms of visual arts, abstract art is a very unique product of the early 20th century, whose legacy still continues to be relevant today even in the 21st century. The universality of abstract art is made possible by its avoidance of figurative elements which at most times pertains to a

particular culture, country, or history. However, such elements are eliminated when one takes into account, a painting made up entirely of unrecognizable colors, shapes and textures.

The *Bhakti* movement which began in Southern India during the 6th century C.E. and spread to North India during the 15th century also played a huge part in shaping a more liberated form of art in India. As an impact of the Bhakti movement Indian literature broke the shackles of restraints imposed by feudalism and seems to develop towards a more creative, people's culture. *Bhakti* poetry, free from the constraints of the formalism of ancient poetics, the feudalist culture and from the courtly atmosphere, is an expression of the people's culture, expressing their own emotions in their own languages. The literatures propagated from the Bhakti movement are more closely reflexive of culture and society of its own time rather than the ancient traditions of Indian culture and literature [222].

Besides the Western context in regards to aesthetic principles of art, India has also witnessed its own unique approaches to the problem of aesthetics. A.K. Coomaraswamy is one of the leading figures in light of Indian aesthetics. His perspective on Indian art and aesthetics serves as a link between the old traditions of Indian art to that of the newer traditions of 20th century Indian art.

Coomaraswamy had the unique distinction of being closely familiar with both European as well as Asian art forms. His theories and writings expounds a thorough grasp of Indian traditions, patterns of thought and feeling, customs and values, philosophy, along with folklore. A significant figure during the colonial period, Coomaraswamy was a pioneer in the field of modern scholarship of Indian art. Being a towering figure in Indian painting and sculpture, he provided an aesthetic-cultural description of Indian identity in the struggle for independence. He was more particularly sensitive to the domain of visual art [223].

During the 20th century, cultural politics, Coomaraswamy emerged as the most significant figure that single-handedly brought a great transformation in taste, sensibility and ways of looking at art. He became a Messiah of the East who saved Indian and Asian art by introducing an alternative, non-Eurocentric aesthetic. Recently, however, there has been reassessment of Coomaraswamy's legacy in the West which directs on him as a

fervent exponent of modernism. From his past as a preserver of Eastern art, nowadays, his work occupies a significant place in the history of modernism itself [224].

He reacted against the Western preconceived notion about Indian art and spoke vocally about that art as ideal and essential, and as a representation of the soul of India in all its beauty. For Coomaraswamy, the dancing Siva of the Nataraja figure was a classic expression of the origins of Indian art and its focus on the principles of synthesis and unity [225].

Artistic creativity, in accordance with Coomaraswamy's principles is a profoundly inward journey undertaken for the aim of reaching out to the Ultimate Reality. Pivotal to this idea is the endeavor to discover and suggest the idea behind the sensuous appearance. Realism when understood in terms of imitation of the perceptual world is quite antipathetic to imagination, and it fails to place in the ideals of Indian art. An important contrast between ideal beauty and empirical beauty is drawn [226].

Coomaraswamy's spiritual readings of Indian art become significant in understanding the essence of Indian aesthetic principles. K.G. Subramanyan in *The Significance of Coomaraswamy's Ideas in Our Times* states that, the far eastern and Indian icon, carved or painted, is neither a memory image nor idealization. It is a visual symbolism "ideal in the mathematical sense". The anthropomorphic icon is of the same kind as a *yantra*, which is the geometrical representation of a deity or *mantra*, which is the auditory representation of a deity. Thereby, the Indian icon fills the whole field of vision at once. All is equally clear and equally vital. The eye is not led to range from one point to another, as in empirical vision. There is no feeling of flesh, but only of stone, metal or pigment, the object being one or the other of this material and not a receptive replica of any objective cause of sensation [227].

It is true that, abstraction as a modern approach to the fine arts arrived comparatively late in India [228]. However, the abstract representation of various philosophical thoughts and theories were not entirely new to traditional Indian visual culture. The visual symbols in Tantric philosophy, such as the *yantra*[Plate 3.4] are a perfect example of such statement. One of the oldest surviving complete tantric texts are Buddhist and it dates back to about 600 C.E. unfortunately, there is no solid evidence as to exactly how old Tantra actually is [229].

Tantra is not limited to a specific kind of religion, although some individuals or group of people or religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism share tantric ideas and practice tantric philosophies and ideals. One of the most intriguing aspects of tantra is the meditative diagrams they use as a visual aid while they meditate. The *yantra* is a visual diagram made up of dots, lines, shapes and various patterns which are assigned their own inner meanings and functions. These diagrams assist the individual to look back into creation. It consists of a number of interlocking triangles which finally vanishes into one point, the dot at the centre which represents the beginning and genesis of the whole universe. The main purpose of the *Shri Yantra* is for meditating on them. It is intended to carry the mind to take a look backward and retrace the steps in the mind, in an attempt to reverse the act of Genesis and gaze directly into the unending and on-going act of creation.

However, the usage of such basic shapes is simply not just abstract forms but signifies the highest notion in optical terms. The pursuit for a geometric system produces the dynamism in tantric images. With the increase in abstraction and accuracy of the diagram, the power of the *yantra* also grows proportionately. A *yantra* expands from its centre through different stages until it reaches the stage where the expansion is complete. There are concentric figures around the centre which take part in this abstraction. The volume of the *yantra* is defined by these concentric structures and produces a rhythmic harmony. Triangle, square, circle, line, point and the lotus symbol are the leading basic forms of which *yantras* are created. To attain the desired objective, all of these mentioned forms are put beside one another, joint, interconnected and recurrent.

One of the most important features of the tantric diagrams is the *bindu*. The genesis point from where the whole diagram expands is at the centre of the *yantra*, all forms are generated from this one singularity, the *bindu*. The centre is a point which is pictured as the ultimate entity beyond which matter or energy cannot be constricted or condensed because of its quality of being a point of null dimension. This absolutely creative centre contains the immeasurable reservoir of combined energy, and therefore it is the genesis of all manifestation. It is also referred to as the *Great Point* or the *Maha Bindu* because as the centre, it controls the entire matter and energy manifested from it [230].

Another important feature of the tantric diagrams is the triangle. Since space cannot be confined by anything less than three lines, the triangle is the model symbol of a sacred space. Thus, when creation initiates, the first closed figure to emerge is the triangle. Therefore, from this perspective, the genesis of all manifested matter is the triangle. This basic geometric form crystallizes the rhythm of creation. With a reference to its shape and character, tantra labels the triangle as the cone of fire. And in the heart of every spiritual explorer, burns this fire of aspiration. There are multiple levels of interpretation over the three sided construction of the triangle. Some of these conceptions are as follows: Creation, Preservation, and Destruction, which are represented by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva respectively; the three dispositions: the positive (*Rajas*), the negative (*Tamas*) and the neutral (*Sattva*); the three Vedas, namely, *Yajurveda*, *Rigveda* and *Samaveda*; the past, the present, and the future; the three main seasons, winter, spring and summer [231].

The triangle is either upright or inverted in a *yantra*. The upright triangle is a symbol of the masculine power, also known as “*Shiva*” and the inverted triangle is a symbol of feminine power also known as “*Shakti*”. The creative impulse in nature is initiated by the energy of the *Shakti*. The first boundary framing the minuscule nucleus is usually the inverted triangle in most *yantras*. The amalgamation of the male (*Shiva*) and female (*Shakti*) which is the merging of the polarities is symbolized when the upright triangle and the inverted triangle interlock with each other to form a hexagon [232].

Another important feature of the *yantra* is the circle. The circular motion of the revolution of the planets and the circles in the *yantras* is mainly derived from it. The circle represents completeness or entirety and signifies the belief of some of the factors which has no beginning and no end such as time. It is equidistant from the nucleus at every point which makes it a perfectly balanced entity; it represents the act of expansion that begins from the *bindu*. The circle is generally placed inside a square outline whenever it is used in a *yantra* [233].

In most *yantras*, the square is a very essential feature. The square has a well thought out and noteworthy logic behind it. There are four directions in which existence expands into. The Earth is bound by these four directions that represent the totality of space. The simplified and flawless expression of the number four is the square. Therefore, the perfect symbolic representation of the terrestrial world is envisioned by the square.

The square outline has four sides which represents four gates, each one that opens up to each of the fundamental directions. The seeker of the spiritual enters the *yantra* through these gates and they are known as cosmic doors. They act as the gateway in which the spiritual seeker enters from the earthly realm and into the central sacred realm of the *yantra*. Furthermore, it is believed that celestial forces guard these gateways or passageways to protect the sacred entity inside from negative and destructive forces [234].

Finally, the expansion of the *yantra* unfolds into the lotus form. In tantric ideologies, the infinite expansion of consciousness is symbolized by the lotus which nurtures the spiritual seeker into the ecstatic elevation of enlightenment from the murky depths of unawareness. Physically, the lotus grows on the water and is not affected by it because the surface of the lotus is smooth and oily. This can be compared to the inner-self, going beyond its own physical boundaries unspoiled and untarnished by deception and unawareness, just like the lotus flower growing in the murky water and mud and eventually blooming out above the surface of the water. One of the major classical symbols used in *yantra* is the lotus blossom. The lotus blossom is a suitable representation to exemplify the unraveling of the power of the spiritual realm, with its petals spreading out towards the perimeter and usually centered on the axis [235].

As observed, the meditative diagram of the *yantra* is made up of various different abstract formal elements such as dots, geometrical shapes such as triangles, circles, squares and the basic aim and intent of the ceremony and meditation combine all these dimensions, and to assist the spiritual journey. As the spiritual seeker goes through the boundaries of the square and move towards the nucleus, the emblem of the blooming lotus indicates the arousal of his or her inner awareness to its extreme potential. Further as the spiritual journey continues, the spiritual seeker come across the numerous features of manifestation essential in nature, which are represented by the male and female values, symbolized by the triangles. The circle binds all of these within it and this represents the fact that these concepts confine all reality. Distance and the progression of time are both encompassed in the journey towards the centre.

Coomaraswamy criticizes the European view of man and nature, and conceptualized an Indian anthropocentric attitude unlike that of the European. He states that the European consciousness has never been able to perceive intuitively the unity of

all life, and obstructed the old Semitic animism that discovers in man a soul that does not exist in animals and trees. And by extent, he further states that, European art divides the consciousness of man from that of nature. However, in contrast to this European consciousness, the Indian aesthetic tradition is that of a race that finds the individual self in every living thing, and even in what some would call inanimate and thereby, it easily recognizes and sometimes exaggerates the essential likeness of animals and men [236].

To study more closely the rejection of mere representation of nature in Indian art, Coomaraswamy takes into account the early Buddhist art which is “truly Buddhist” in contrast to “an art about Buddhism” which cease to be truly Buddhist in spirit and character. He differentiates the authentic Buddhist art from the art about Buddhism in accordance with that of the non-representational and idealistic character. This meant that, it is impossible for the Buddha figure to be represented in any human form due to early Buddhist conception of the immortality of the *bodhisattva*, which could not be represented in human form. Thus, the spiritual non-bodily type of art occupies a place in Coomaraswamy’s principles. In regards to this spiritual disembodied aesthetics, Coomaraswamy states that, to make human figures is wrong, or even unholy. He further states that a deformed image of God is always better than an image of man, however beautiful [237].

Coomaraswamy continues to state that, according to the above mentioned doctrine that imitation and portraiture are the lesser aims than the representation of ideal and symbolic forms. Thereby, the goal of the highest art must always be the imitation of the intimation of the Divinity behind all forms. He gives an example of the depiction of Krishna with the *gopis*, in which one may depict it in the spirit of religious idealism, not for the mere sake of sensuous idealism [238].

Coomaraswamy emphasizes on imagination and memory, and not imitation of appearances. He devises a subjective idealist philosophy of nature that discerns spiritual inwardness in which, Indian art-forms are said not to represent nature. He states that probably no Indian sculpture has been sculpted directly from a living model, or any religious painting copied from life. Probably the old schools of Hindu artists ever drew from nature at all. The finer means of the artist’s purpose were his store of memory pictures, his power of visualization and imagination, because, the artist’s desire was to suggest the Idea behind sensuous appearance, not to give the detail of the seeming reality

that was in truth but *maya* (illusion). To the Hindu, nature remains a Veil, not a revelation, and art is something higher than the bare imitation of this *maya*. Its purpose is the manifestation of what lies beyond [239].

Accordingly, unlike its Western counterpart, Indian art is not an imitation of an object actually seen at a specific point of time, but is in fact, a work of the visionary imagination. This “visionary imagination” thus becomes the essence and leitmotif of Indian art. Thus, Coomaraswamy shares the Orientalist method of visualization that is strongly opposed to the Western academic style of naturalism, illusionism and the Greek principle of mimesis. Similar to Havell, he states that the physical and the phenomenal “real” have to be abandoned in order to grasp the “imaginary” and the “symbolic”. He discusses about the subtle symbolism of posture of the body or position of the hands, which is the body in activity or repose, the hand in gesture of granting, destroying, pleading, or in some posture of uttermost abstraction. All of this symbolism constitutes an expressive art speech which is easily understood by those familiar with it [240].

In the West, before the advent of the modern art movement and its various exponents, Western art felt the need to adhere strictly to the rules of anatomy, perspective and faithful imitation of nature and surroundings. In accordance with this tradition, the theory of imitation held sway in Western art for a long time, until it came to be superseded by the theory of expression and other new ways of looking and appreciating art, along with art theories such as Formalism. However, in Indian art traditions, the artists did not feel the need for photographic imitation of their subjects, and they were the least interested in the outward appearances of their subjects. This tradition is in complete contrast to that of ancient Greek traditions who felt the need to use the most ideal men and women in their society as a model for depicting their Gods and mythological characters.

Ancient Greek artists had always paid extra attention to the careful detailing of the muscular structure of the figures to make them as anatomically ideal and perfect as much as possible. However, in the case of ancient Indian sculptures, as can be seen in various sculptures like that of the statue of *Nataraja*[Plate 3.5], it can be observed that the figure is slightly elongated, slender and does not adhere strictly to any sort of photographic imitation of an ideal human being. Instead, the sculptor has paid more attention to the juxtaposition of the figure, the limbs, the hand gestures and their expressive qualities.

For Indian artists, every segment of the human form and every joint in the skeleton structure of the human body are given importance, because they not only explored the physical aspects of the body but the correlation between the physical body to its meaning. The Indian artists were not interested in the idealized individual but rather the impersonal emotions, the universal prototype which he portrays in his subject. Kapila Vatsyayan, in her book, *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts*, has explained in detail some of the most significant theories behind the complex meaning of the movements of the human body, the joints, and the positions in which they shift connected with each other. The movement of each single limb and joints within the human body has a subsequent emotional quality. Every movement and gesture of the body including that of the facial structure such as the eyes, eyebrows, cheeks, nose, mouth, chin etc. thus assumes certain significance of their own and as a composite whole.

The doctrines of sculpture can also be applied to paintings as well. Most of the figures depicted in Indian paintings and sculptures are the embodiment of gods of Indian literature in concrete plastic structure. The epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and the underlying philosophical principles of the *Upanishads* are the major themes in Indian art such as sculpture, painting, drama, dance, etc. The deities depicted in Indian art are the physical embodiment of abstract ideas and the human form is used as a mode of communication of this soul state. The human form, the various physical gestures act as an active vehicle for these expressions which are abstract in nature. Every aspect of the human body, the face, and the positions of the limbs, fist and every pose of the figure is assigned with some inner meaning. The Indian artists presented the human form as a symbolic structure which evokes the states of being [241].

Taking into account, the finest example of the symbolic elements in Indian sculptures, the statue of Nataraja is one that stands out among the many other countless figures in Indian sculpture. The sculpture embodies a complex philosophical doctrine with a touch of artistic perfection to the formal quality of the work. In a journal, written by Gomathi Narayan, *Shiva Nataraja as a Symbol of Paradox*, it is stated that,

The dance of Shiva is used as recurring figure in many Indian fictions. And insome of these fictions, the most significant aspect common to these works were the fact that the dance of Shiva is viewed as a paradox. This is because the dance of Shiva is generally regarded as a symbol of the destruction of the universe and death. However,

besides the embodiment of destruction, it is also symbolic of gentleness and kindness. In the sculpture, Shiva is depicted to be in a dancing pose, surrounded by a ring of fire. His left leg is raised and the right foot tramples on a dwarfish figure which is popularly known as the representation of the demon of ignorance and forgetfulness. Shiva is also seen with four arms, in which he holds a fire on one of his left hand and a drum on one of his right hand. The Drum is symbolic of creation and the fire that of destruction. The third hand of *Nataraja* is posed in the *abhaya mudra* which states “Have no fear” denoting the protective and compassionate side of Shiva. His fourth hand points toward his uplifted foot which is symbolic of release and salvation [242].

As observed, Indian sculptures put major emphasis on the expressive qualities of hand gestures such as the *abhaya mudra* and the rhythmic position of the torso and limbs suggestive of dancing. Every position and part of the body is assigned its own significance and meaning. The sculptor also has not attempted a direct photographic imitation of the human form either. However, while studying and observing the various sculptures of classical Greek and Renaissance, it is clear that the Western artists had put a lot of effort and emphasis on the photographic imitation of human figure.

The Greek artists, moreover had an obsession for beauty and the ideal which were reflected in their sculptures. Therefore, they chose the most well-proportioned athletic and muscular individuals as their models for their sculptures. For example, the sculptures of *Discobolus*[Plate 3.6] and the *Statue of Zeus or Poseidon*[Plate 3.7] exhibit such characteristics. These figures are frozen in mid-action and the artists paid extra attention to the detailed realistic depiction of the muscular structure of the figures. The figures are anatomically precise, with well-defined muscles. The *Discobolus* represents an athlete about to throw the disc. The limbs and torso pose are full of action, however, unlike the Indian sculpture such as the *Nataraja*, the positions and pose of hands, limbs do not convey any symbolic meaning but rather a means of displaying the athletic stance of the figure. The same goes for the Statue of Poseidon or Zeus. It is a bronze sculpture in which studies believe the figure is a depiction of Greek god, Zeus or possibly, Poseidon.

The figure, just like the *Discobolus* is frozen mid-action in careful realistic depiction which looks like it is about to throw a spear or a trident. Unlike, the Greek artists, the Indian artists did not feel the need for such photographic imitation but rather were more invested in the inner spiritual content of the poses that was made in concrete

physical structure of the hand postures, leg, feet positions and such. Thus, from these examples, the differences between the Greek and Indian art can be observed. Although, the techniques and mediums are similar, the aesthetical values behind the Greek and Indian art are completely different.

From taking up the position as a defender of Eastern art, today Coomaraswamy's principles occupy a significant part in the history of modernism itself. Modernist affinities between Coomaraswamy and the leading modernists who adopted formalism, such as Clive Bell and Roger Fry as a confluence between Western and Eastern art are queried by art critic, Allan Antliff. The principle of Formalism which only required one to have a good pair of eyes in order to comprehend art became increasingly esoteric and lapsed into aestheticism of the elitist, something which was heavily critiqued by Coomaraswamy. For Coomaraswamy, the social function of art and its cultural relevance are the designations through which modernist affinities could genuinely offer a comparative of the East and the West. Such critique put up by Coomaraswamy finds its relevance when art history was introduced into the curriculum of Indian universities under colonialism, because it was formalism that was the dominant method adopted by art historians in India [243].

The history of modernism credits high value towards the introduction of primitivism when one is asked to imagine Picasso's ventures into Cubism without his exposure to African tribal masks. Spiritualism appears to be the flip-side of primitivism, in which most diatribes against modernism seem to be framed. Coomaraswamy's significance in the early 20th century among the arguments about the authenticity of modern art attests to this subdued course of spiritualism. The more profound affinity towards spiritualism is associated with artists like Kandinsky who looked towards non-Western sources to revitalize Western art [244].

While comprehending the Aesthetical Philosophy of Coomaraswamy, it is important to note that Coomaraswamy distinguishes Indian art as Religion centric. He states that the intimation of Divinity is the aim of Indian art. However, the Infinite and Unconditioned cannot be conveyed in finite terms, and art, unable to portray divinity unconditioned, and reluctant to be restricted by the limitations of humanity is committed to the representation of gods in India, who represents the comprehensible aspects of an infinite whole [245].

The content of such kind of art is not the bare imitation of nature or the phenomenal world. It is not simply a visual record of what the physical eye sees, rather it tries to comprehend the essential truth underlying the physical world. The comprehension of such underlying truth provides an insight into the objective and methodology of Indian art. The infinite and the Unconditioned has been the creative engagement in India [246].

Coomaraswamy states that, in the Vedas, the practice of art is viewed as a form of yoga [247]. Yoga is a means of acquiring harmony and unity of consciousness through immense concentration. Furthermore, it is through the means of yoga that the artist finds it possible to discover the true nature of things. Coomaraswamy's such view of art finds support from *Silpasastras*, and he further states, concerning the imager to establish images in temples by meditation on the deities who are the subjects of his devotion. To be completely absorbed in contemplation is possible, not even by direct and immediate vision of an actual object, but by the making of images [248].

Such inwardization of the visual images bear the mark of "a spiritual discovery" rather than creation. The artist "sees" the image through his mind's eye and seeks to represent this vision through line and color. Thereby, when one observes Indian paintings, they can make out boldly executed images with distinct lines and contours, void of any vague or fuzzy details. There is no attempt to create the illusion of three-dimensionality of physical reality, but the image is made up of strong flowing lines that are definitive in their character and the color application is defined by the contoured areas [249].

Such characteristics in many of various styles of Indian paintings such as in Mughal and Rajput paintings as well as the various folk art traditions such as the Kalighat paintings. Such indigenous styles would also later prove to be of profound interest for the 20th century pre-independence and post-independence Indian artists. When one observe Rajput painting such as *Bani Thani* [Plate 3.8] by Nihal Chand, it can be seen that the style of execution is very bold, displays a peculiar flatness and the figure outlined. There is no attempt to depict the figure in a fully naturalistic style which was much prevalent in the Western academic traditions.

Before the development of modern art and the Avant-garde movements such as Cubism, Expressionism, Fauvism, etc. western art was more inclined towards the faithful imitation or representation of objects, surroundings, anatomical precision, perspective, etc. However, this tradition took a slight turn with the development of the photographic

camera during the mid-19th century. With the coming of Impressionist artists, the dawn of abstraction in Western art developed. Distortions and loose brush works were introduced as opposed to the earlier traditions of carefully finished work by working up layer by layer of paints. Even though, western art was developing towards abstraction and distortion, meanwhile, in India, the earlier Western imitative style of realism held sway in India because of its introduction to the Indian artists by the Company school. As a result, during the late 19th century, emerged artists such as Raja Ravi Verma, who was one of the first Indian to fully master the Western oil painting technique.

When one observes Ravi Verma's painting such as *Shakuntala*[Plate 3.9], it can be observed that he has executed the painting in flawless naturalistic style of traditional Western art. He has paid attention to the shadows, perspective, cast shadows and precise anatomical study. Although, it appears that Ravi Verma did not have much idea or knowledge of the earlier art of India. His painting was drawn toward the Western imitative qualities and theatricality. However, various modern thinkers emerged in India with their aesthetic principles to establish a fallacy towards such traditions. The Tagores especially Rabindranath and Abanindranath has given some insightful thoughts and aesthetic doctrines regarding this case. Their theories find both similarities and differences to Western thinkers such as Kant, Tolstoy and Croce.

Indian artists aim in creating an idealized image rather than blindly imitating the physical world. Art, in this light, steers clear of the extreme polarities of high realism on one hand and dry abstraction, on the other. Tagore differentiates between reality and realism and states that, art is the response of man's creative soul to the comprehension of the real and further states that the real manifests in its ideal form of fulfilment in the naturally introspective mind of the Eastern artists [250].

The Indian ideals on art and aesthetics, the meaning and function of art have close affinities with that of the Western ideals. The objective concept of beauty in Indian aesthetic ideas often came very near to the Platonic idea. Sri Aurobindo, true to his philosophical ideals, often laid emphasis on the wonderfully subtle parallels between that of Indian and Greek thought. In fact, his ideas of *cittasuddhi* have suitably matched the idea of catharsis as found in ancient Greek aesthetics theories [251]. The purpose and meaning of art as understood by the Modern Indian thinkers were also not that different from the significance of art as formulated by the ancient Indian aesthetics [252].

Rabindranath Tagore's principle of aesthetics revolves around the principle of expression. Expression is the ultimate expression of *ananda* and the act of expression is as much an instance for spiritual bliss [253]. Some of the main principles of art in Tagore's view are as follows: Tagore's conception of art is revolved around intuition-expression. It also has some ontological significance apart from the formal qualities of the works; the creation of art is not prompted by necessity or desire. It had its own inevitability. The core inner workings of the artist's mind are generated by the aesthetic intuition-expression which is the conscious as well as the sub-conscious mind of the artists. Aesthetic pleasure was the pleasure for self-expression and accordingly of self-realization. *Ananda* resided in this principle of expression, and in the course of it, self-realization was possible. For Tagore, the value of art resided in the fact that art brings nature close to man and enables him to create an intimacy [254].

Tagore has taken various art forms to the principle of aesthetic which include, poetry, drama, painting, etc. Man has many innate desires and one of them revolves around survival which involves activities which have utility. The other and the higher kind of desire is the desire for man's union with the universe; the desire of man, such as combining the end of the day with the beautifully lit sunset and other wonders of nature with his mind and soul. This desire for union indicates the freedom of oneself from one's own inner struggles and obstacles. For Tagore, literature is a reflection of man's instinctive longing for union with the world which includes all things and living beings. And in this union he believed that the individual man forgot all his particular interests which were more or less organic in nature. Man's interest in the objects of the universe for their own sake is a higher kind of desire and called as "disinterested contemplation of thing" by some of the major Western thinkers such as Kant [255].

When a man of feeling who observes and receives and merges his heart and soul with the universe expresses his magnificent experience of his union with the universe and self-enlargement, it is art or literature. In a quest for worldly gains (man's practical life), man split up the union with the universe and he is deprived of pure delight. This pure delight or pleasure could be attained through intuition in a sense of unification and oneness with the universe as a harmonious whole and manifested forth into different kinds of art and literature. In this aspect, Tagore has very close affinities to Croce in his reference to different kinds of human activity. Both of them agree that beauty and truth are subject-dependent [256].

As noted from the previous sections, in Croce's theory, it is observed that the objectivistic perspective of spiritual life as objective self-fulfilment through objectified expression of the self through the artworks. For Croce, the life of the spirit is the self-objectification as intuition-expression of the spirit's inner sentimental turmoil. It is the spirit's *a priori* aesthetic synthesis of imagination and feeling, the objectified expression of the inner turmoil. However, intuition is merely the first stage of spiritual culmination. The pleasure which it brings is that of successful expression. For Croce, pleasure was purely empirical and psychical, whereas for Tagore it was transcendental in nature. The idea of objectification of self-expression or de-subjectification as seen in Croce's theory may also be found in Tagore's, who considered intuition-expression to be the primary aesthetic fact [257].

Tagore's aesthetic views could also be observed in his works such as *Brooding* [Plate 3.10] where he made use of unnatural colors and the monotonous dark somber color of the painting adds to its expressionistic charm. The formal properties of the painting draw the spectator into a feeling of despair and to identify with the artist's inner turmoil.

While trying to find the definition of art, Tagore was lead to the conclusion that art is indefinable due to its flexible nature and its multidimensional facades. This has led to a lot of people in differing views and definitions when it comes to the purpose, function and definition of art. One of the many attributes of the versatile nature of art includes the spiritual dimension, which is art being considered as a form of spiritual activity. Tagore considers art to be a spiritual activity which is inspired by the will to create and it is the primary and fundamental inclination in man [258].

Tagore states that poetry is nature idealized and that as art it is different from nature, as naturalistic poetry is from true poetry. Naturalistic poetry requires mere observation whereas true poetry requires contemplation on the things observed. If it requires only observation without the need for contemplation then it is no better than the exact copy of nature. These mere copies can never be artistic because art is a product of the spirit [259].

In Tagore's view, art is expression and his aesthetic theory may categorize to be that of spiritual character. It is the spirit of the artist which perceive the joys and sorrows of life which are then imprinted into his own psyche, which are then in turn objectified

into the work of art and the artist expresses his subjective reactions to his objective surrounding [260].

Tagore's concept of expression takes into consideration the content of the work, and hence he is not a formalist in art. Expression as being the expression of personality is not merely a formal concept. Expression in its own sense could be the entire truth about art. However, Tagore believes the significance of expression as free from its content-reference and asserts that expression in this way is not the whole truth of art. It is only the primary truth. Tagore's consideration of expression as the primary truth in art leaves a big scope for the content presuming a distinction between form and content of art as absolute. It may be that Tagore is unconsciously inclined towards the principle of "art for life's sake" and wants life to be reflected in art. Therefore he was not satisfied with expression in this sense and wanted to see how ideas and ideals of life were reflected in the work of art [261].

He also further states that the primary truth about art is expression but the ultimate truth is the expression of man as a composite of sense, mind and the spirit. In art, one not only considers that there is expression, but how much is expressed. This statement tips the balance in support of art-content. But his balance is short lived because he again reverts back to the other end and states that expression is everything. He seems to look for a compromise and wants a balance between expression and what is to be expressed. Tagore's alternate emphasis on both form and content of art implies that both are equally significant. This unity and significance of both appears to him to be of formal quality and he stresses on the significance of form but in actuality he believes in the fusion of both [262].

Abanindranath was one of the foremost Indian artists to bring about a nationalist revival to Indian art and his principles on aesthetics were considered to be one of the most significant contributions to modern Indian art and aesthetics. To understand his aesthetic doctrine, it becomes necessary to understand his artworks as well. Abanindranath is very important in this context because he was influenced by the principles of both the East and the West. Thereby, it resulted in him, to be able to fully utilize the goodness of both the sides.

Abanindranath and the establishment of the Bengal school was much relevant because not only did they brought about the nationalist movement in Indian art, but in the

process, they also looked back to explore the traditional arts of India. They lifted those old principles to their hearts and further imbibed the traditions of oriental art and the newly developing western modern movement. This unique fusion in his work can be seen in his painting of *Bharat Mata* [Plate 3.11]. Studying this painting, it is quite easy to observe and understand how that fusion of various art styles is conglomerated in his work. The painting has the charm of the serene tone of oriental art, and it is symbolic of Indian values. The items held in the hands of the figure depict items such as the book, paddy, the garland and the white cloth. These items are symbolic of Indian values, and Abanindranath has cleverly exploited their properties to express the nationalist Swadeshi ideals during the Indian independence movement. However, Abanindranath did not abandon realism altogether, but the representational aspect in his works were an amalgamation of the multitude of influences he had from various traditions [263].

Both Abanindranath and Rabindranath gave a clear distinction between the artist and the craftsman. They expressed views against the extraneous emphasis on technique which was much prevalent in modern art and literature of the time. By this, however, Abanindranath did not mean that technique should be completely abandoned. He expressed views that to be a good artist, one must master the technique. However, one must transcend and go beyond the domain of technique and reach the realm of the beautiful. Technique is a means to which both the artist and the craftsman are concerned. However, for the craftsman, the technique is everything. He further states that technique incorporates labor alone, and that it does not have the attainment of *ananda* or joy. The attainment of *ananda* in his work distinguishes the artist from the craftsman [264].

Abanindranath shares the principles of the spiritual aspect of art with the Western artists such as Kandinsky and Mondrian. He states that art is not something which is external; rather it is spiritual and identifies with the development and creative spirit of one's inner intuition. The mental image is the real picture. A counter speech may arise that the pictorial representation of the objective and physical world is real, whereas, in the mental imagination, that picture or the intuitive process is in a subjective state. Therefore, there is no way how one can identify the two. The answer to this problem is that in the mind of the artist, there is the urge for the intuitive desire of creation. In response to the creative, there is a corresponding domain of imagination, visual embodiment of the mental state, which is a direct result of the objective representation through lines, colors and patterns. What one experiences externally is merely a physical

embodiment which translates the mental concept and imagination. Thereby, the external representation becomes merely an imitation of the internal state [265].

The imitative aspect of art was not something new to the older Indian aesthetics thinkers as well. The imitative nature of art especially in a dance performance and drama has also been clearly discussed in older Indian aesthetics theory. Imitation as a vehicle for presenting a drama on stage was well recognized in India from roughly around the 5th century B.C.E. [266].

During the older years of Indian aesthetics, the principles of the imitation-illusion theory in art were also rejected by the followers and exponents of the *Samkhya* School of philosophy. They rejected the theory of imitation-illusion because it failed to enlighten the crucial principle of aesthetic experience which the spectator derives from that dramatic presentation, because it did not take into consideration the consciousness of the basic emotions [267].

When a historical event is imitated and presented on stage as a dramatic presentation, it should create such an illusion that it deludes the spectator to take the artificial stage product to be real. Thereby, his experience becomes a thing of illusion, and that will evoke responses which is similar to that of the real. Therefore, the presentation of tragedy on stage cannot be dissimilar to the real. However, it is not so. Imitation is simply imitation because it fails to produce the most crucial aspect of the entity which is imitated. It was for such conditions in the nature of art that, Plato himself could not find a place of art in his ideal republic. He maintains his firm statement that, if art is an illusory imitation of the real, it does not contain any independent value and is forever dependent as an imperfect copy of the real. For him, what art does is already done much better by nature [268].

Art follows or imitates nature and then surpasses it. On one side, the artist observes and perceives the restraints that is offered to him by the material world in the form of her laws, whereas, he has the freedom available to him from the domain of imagination. Art simply sought for a synthesis between these two domains. Nature might be an initiation point for the art but it is certainly not the end goal. Moreover, Abanindranath believed art to be interpretation. Art interprets nature and expounds new meanings and perspective to all the dreary and mechanical aspects of nature. He believed art was selective and interpretative. It does not mindlessly follow the mechanical ways of nature. The mere

imitation of nature in such way equates art as servitude to nature and its unrefined material aspect resulting in the gradual loss of the artist's freedom in the process. In the absence of freedom, art is not possible [269].

Art detaches itself from representation of nature and gradually becomes an embodiment of intuited ideas and concepts [270]. According to him, it should not just imitate nature blindly as it is and he believes that the artist's job is to create a world of values, which is hardly seen in the mundane existence of reality. The embodiment of intuitive visions and ideas in a work of art is different from representation.

Aristotle's idea of imitation differs from that of Plato and the more commonly known and studied imitation theory, which resulted in the theory of representation and selective representation. Selective representation is an effective means of emotional representation. And, according to Aristotle, the function of representational art is to evoke emotion as studied through his theory of *Catharsis*. It seems that both Aristotle and Abanindranath Tagore were against the idea of the photographic imitation. Studying their theories so far seems to suggest that mere imitation is drab and thereby, inartistic. The image falls short of the real and loses the very essence of the real and cannot justify the comportment of the real. And, since it is already established in the above paragraphs that art transcend beyond nature and is an improvement upon it, such image cannot be considered as artistic [271].

Since, such conditions arise in their aesthetic principles, Abanindranath did not have much regard for the principles of anatomy, caste shadows and perspective, the elements of art which were much too fundamental to the British realists in their works. The educated Indian during that time could not initially appreciate Abanindranath's paintings because they were influenced greatly by the British realists' legacy of the photographic imitation of the material world [272].

Art of 20th century India is a result of years of cross influences between various styles, reflecting the spirit of ancient Indian art of Ajanta and Ellora caves, Mughal and Rajput Miniature paintings, indigenous folk art such as Kalighat, Madhubani, and Kalamkari art to name a few, along with foreign influences from the British academic style of realism, and finally the most profound influences from the 20th century Western avant-garde artists such as Cezanne, Picasso, Klee and Kandinsky.

In India also, one can find remnants of ancient rock paintings on the wall of caves which are located in several districts of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, etc. Rock art in India was first discovered by an Archaeologist, Archibald Carlley. Rock art has influenced and inspired a lot of Indian folk art traditions. Rock art such as of the Bhimbetka caves displays a variety of geometrical shapes, everyday scenes of hunting, food gatherers, riders of horses and elephants with metal weapons. Most of the figures are highly simplified stick figures that are drawn in a single color like earthy red [273].

All of these ancient art have in one way or the other influenced the modern and contemporary art that are seen today in India. In the last few decades, the country has experienced a prospering of the art on a scale not seen since the advent of the great Mughal empire during the 16th and 17th centuries. Even though contemporary Indian art shares many features with the Western art scene, it stays free from the anxieties that Western art faces as it struggles for originality in this age of post-modernity. Today, Indian art is pleasingly unselfconscious and, being fundamentally indigenous of spirit, it is confidently embedded in the Indian spirit. But additional exploration of the art of ancient India such as that of the Indus valley civilization, names of the great artists of the past still remain anonymous to us because Indian culture has always considered the authorship of a work of art less significant than its actual creation. Traditionally, art was created for a purpose such as rituals, meditation or enjoyment, and it was created by the people for the people in a fluid communal framework, in which the personalities of the creators fused with the anticipation of the beholders [274].

In India before the development of modern art, the magnificent Kalighat paintings were already thriving as a vibrant art-form, and it was being practised in Calcutta when the Bengal School of Art under Abanindranath Tagore and E.B. Havell was gathering momentum. Abanindranath Tagore held on passionately to Indian history and tradition as his chosen subject matter, and painted his images with techniques learned from Japanese masters. Abanindranath Tagore was the first serious Indian artist in the modern sense of word [275].

The main artists who were the innovators of 20th century modern Indian art were the sculptor such as Ramkinkar Vaij who was regarded as one of the first modern Indian sculptor. His contemporary and fellow student at Shantiniketan, Benode Behari Mukherjee and Jamini Roy were also one of the pioneers of 20th century modern Indian

art. Jamini Roy was inspired from the Indian folk tradition of Kalighat paintings which he masterfully applied to his artworks in a modernist fashion. And then, there is Nandalal Bose who is a student of Abanindranath Tagore himself. Even though Bose was well conscious of the prevalent global developments in art, he remained nationalistic to the core. He favored oriental to Western trends which he improvised and altered so that his conceptual and pictorial manifestations were truly Indian [276]. Gaganendranath Tagore also experimented with cubism as seen in his painting, *Temple cubistic*[Plate 3.12].

In the modern context, some of the important emphasis on form and color came with artists such as Cezanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh who left behind a legacy for The Fauves, Cubist and Expressionist who were among the first to move towards the direction of distortion and semi-abstraction and finally towards pure abstraction. Western art looking towards primitive and exotic sources such as African tribal art was also an important aspect. Such developments in the West were also similar to that of the developments in India during the 20th century. Indian artists, in order to maintain the Indian identities in their works, began to look back towards indigenous folk art, miniature paintings such as Rajput paintings and ancient cave monuments such as Ajanta and Ellora. During this time in history, people have witnessed the art of Indian artists such as the likes of Jamini Roy, Amrita Sher-Gil, Ramkinkar Baij, etc. These artists who initiated the emergence of modern art in India also became an important bridge between studying traditional art, culture and tradition with the later developments during the post-independence era.

The exhibition of the Bauhaus artists held in Calcutta in 1922 was an eye-opener, and exhibited the first of contemporary European art in India. The bold works of the Bauhaus artists such as Kandinsky and Klee shown in the exhibition left the minuscule local art world with awe and wonder. It had just experienced the real “modern art”. Terms such as “pure painting” and “painting without subject matter” were for the first time introduced to the artists and critics who in their bewilderment tried to grasp their meaning [277].

Another significant artist who ushered in the art of modern India was Amrita Sher-Gil. “Fascinated by the lives of the Indian people, its traditions, practices and indigenous sources, she was deeply inspired by the originality of Ajanta and Ellora, the Indian miniatures of the Basohli School, the Rajput miniatures and the beauty of Kushana

sculptures at Mathura. During her stay in Shimla, the subjects of her paintings were that of poor hill people, who to her naive mind represented the spirit of India [278]. Such characteristics could be observed in her work such as *Bride's Toilet* [Plate 3.13].

During 1934, Sher-Gil stated that modern art had led her to the comprehension and appreciation of Indian painting and sculpture. She was furthermore opposed to the academic realists for their principles that the ultimate end of art is to faithfully reproduce objects, ignoring the fact that such servile imitation is in fact a degrading factor of the limitations of art. Her strongest statement towards academic realism was its delimitation of the function of art. For her, the role of art was not to suppress imagination, but to liberate it. Being an artist, at the most crucial period of Indian art scene, she managed to prophesy the trend of world art and discerned the confluence between Eastern and Western art [279].

Significant numbers of 20th century Indian artists also owe it to primitive, folk and tribal art for expounding new styles of art in which they could retain their Indian identities after the influences of the Company school. The source of tribal and folk art in India had a profound connection with rock art. Conferring to the everyday life of the group, it displayed a chronological advancement in the theme and character of drawings. Indication of the artistic aptitude of people in the form of paintings and carvings in rock shelters beginning from the Mesolithic period (8000 years BP) was found which are the earliest documented forms of art [280].

Jamini Roy being one of the first few to look back to traditional sources left a huge legacy for other future artists such as K.G. Subramanyan and J. Swaminathan. Roy's early career includes portraits and fauvist-style landscapes in oils which were satisfactory of the modern idioms and typical "art society" images. "However, such works was not satisfactory for his own restless spirit. Later on, he abandoned this approach and after witnessing an eye-opening exhibition of the Bauhaus artists, which was held in Calcutta in the December of 1922, his whole perspective changed. Roy finally found his magnum opus by looking back to his village, in rural Bengal and the Kalighat paintings. He started incorporating the bold, plain, simplified linear rhythm of Kalighat paintings into his own [Plate 3.14]. He even abandoned ready-made canvases and started making his own paint surfaces from clothes, woods, mats, etc. Like the Kalighat patuas, he even abandoned conventional factory made colors in favor of natural earth and vegetable colors [281].

Such bold characteristics in his work could be seen in Roy's painting such as *Mother and Child with St. John* [Plate 3.15]. The shape of the eyes, the bold outlines and vivid flat colors are much reminiscent of Indian folk paintings.

Jaya Appasamy stated that Jamini Roy's approach to art started a new course not only in fine arts but also design, illustration and a revival of handicrafts which was a significant achievement of that time. The art scene of that time and the ones to come in the future owe it to Jamini Roy for his reconsideration of folk art into his contemporary work [282]. It is to be noted that, at that time when increasing number of Indian artists were attracted to foreign art forms, Jamini Roy was the first artist to look back to folk art and use it conspicuously and creatively.

Jahan states that Roy's intention was never to bring about any elements of abstraction. However, his works are coherent with the process of abstraction where the imitation of the formal properties is of identical because its main approach was towards abstraction [283].

Another significant artist who is crucial in the transitional phase from traditional to modern art was Ramkinkar Baij. He spent most of his life in Shantiniketan and earned a reputation as the foremost modern sculptor, and had profound influence on future generations of artists. He was initially trained in the western academic style. His works are mostly based on the common folks and the formal properties of his sculptures were an unusual synthesis of native folks merged with cubist elements, portraying symbolic depths and social significance as seen in works such as *Mill Call* [Plate 3.16]. By the year, 1935, his works displayed curiosity in structural quality, which is characteristic of his works during the 40s and 50s, which displayed abstract and surrealist features. And it seems evidently that he was influenced by Rabindranath Tagore's view that even though tradition is important, it should not be an obstacle between the artists and his artistic growth. As can be seen in his painting such as *Call of the Mill* [Plate 3.17], his oil paintings are highly individualistic and he did not stick to faithful imitation, rather paving his own path towards a desired mode of expression, whether it be cubistic, expressionistic, abstract or surrealist [284].

After independence, during 1947, The Progressive Artists Group was founded by F.N. Souza and was made up of five members namely, M.F. Hussain, K.H. Ara, H.A. Gade, S.K. Bakre and S.H. Raza. The group sought to function in a wider framework,

they wanted to be associated to progresses elsewhere in the world and make their work strictly of the time in an international sense. On a more practical level, its members wanted exhibitions on their own terms, expecting to be able to live off their work and achieve appreciation from it.

They had understood decisively that, without permitting their Indian essence to be subsumed by it, the future of Indian art lay not in its romanticized part, but in the model presented by a technologically progressing West. In this way they were dissimilar from Abanindranath and the Bengal school, and in that lay their strength. So many influences were apparent in their work from the Indus Valley civilization, the erotic sculpture of Khajuraho and Indian folk art, on the one hand to the works of impressionists, fauvists and cubists on the other. S.H. Raza painted lyrical landscapes and found recognition in Paris and later rose as the most eminent protagonist of the Neo-Tantric art. Raza's advanced work became peacefully meditative and pleasing in a composed, beautiful way. The chief contribution of the PAG in modern Indian art was developing the attitude that even if their idea of modernity was enthused by Western modernity, its members had implemented an extremely proficient attitude in terms of their own resourcefulness and their association with the world [285].

PAG artist such as Hussain also rose as one of the most prominent figures of post-independence Indian art scene. His success and appeal lies in his work being grounded on Indian realities on so many levels. Sometimes full of contradictions, his biggest success is a result of his intuitive, and being in harmony with the pulse of Indian society and being tied to the Indian soil and culture [286].

Such harmony can be observed in many of his large body of works. Works such as *Bridal Tonga* [Plate 3.18] of the 50s and *Urdu Poetry Series* [Plate 3.19] of the 80s are some of the many works in which one can observe the genius of Husain's work. The figures are highly distorted and simplified with bright colors which are reminiscent of fauvist colors and the structural qualities of the cubists. The picture plane is a vibrant image reflecting Indian society and culture with a narrative charm which is very much tied to the Indian soil.

Further developments in the 20th century art scene of India has witnessed artists such as Jagdish Swaminathan, who also strove for the simple rendering of folk and tribal art and a childlike innocence which are executed in plain geometrical forms, and animals

like birds along with serene background landscapes producing an evocative picture. In later years, his picture plane was dominated by imagery derived from folk and tribal perceptions. He experimented with the pictorial potentials with his own creativity as he discontinued the use of traditional standards, and used graphical descriptions and symbols which have affinities to tribal and folk motifs.

Ultimately, Swaminathan's objective was to create a continuum between the traditional folk and tribal art with modern art. His aim was to redefine contemporary art of India of that time by forming a language of his own and by interrogating the hold of contemporary developments which were influenced by western art traditions. His main impact on Indian art lies in adopting the rich and indigenous folk and tribal art of India, and encouraging the people to give effort towards its international appreciation. From around 1968, Swaminathan began linking elements of nature in abstract landscapes, such as hills and mountains, trees, rocks, water bodies and so on. In his painting such as *Kalateet* [Plate 3.20], the painting is radiant and manifest in a serene and calm meditative state. These series are suggestive in nature and they are open to interpretation by the viewer. They symbolize a manifestation of unity with nature [287].

The formal structure of tantric diagrams and the underlying philosophy of Tantra have intrigued many 20th century Post-Independence Indian artists as can be observed in Biren De's *January* [Plate 3.21], G.R. Santosh's *Agni* [Plate 3.22], S.H. Raza's *Pakriti* [Plate 3.23]. The usage of the formal structure of tantric diagrams in modern Indian art resulted in a dynamic new form of abstraction which is very much Indian to the core merged with the modernist trend of that time. However, it is important to note that, the original diagrams in tantra were used as an aid for meditation and not solely as a work of art admired for its aesthetic qualities. However, this would be in vice versa with that of the paintings made by the above mentioned 20th century Indian artists.

Thus, it can be observed how Indian indigenous sources were fully conscious of the underlying abstract principles of the universe, even before the Western traditions. In the West, the usage of such abstract formal components in art came into prominence only with the burgeoning of modern art during the early 20th century. Avant-garde artists such as Kandinsky and Mondrian began to realize the significance of abstract forms and how that can be used to steer art into a more spiritual form of communication.

Both tantra art and folk art served as a source of inspiration for some of the eminent Modern artists of India in their journey towards abstraction. This includes artists such as S.H. Raza, Biren De and G.R. Santosh who were considered as an exponent of the Neo-Tantric art and K.G. Subramanyan and J. Swaminathan who were some of the eminent artists to be inspired by folk art traditions of India. Due to the implementation of the British ideas in art, the innovation of folk and tribal art of India in the 20th century is a phenomenon in the wake of the nationwide awareness. The various ranges of ornamental themes, characteristics and symbols are some of the most significant artistic association between the past and the present. They frequently reappear and have stayed persistent all the way through even if the meaning and message they convey may differ from one era to another era.

The artworks of many 20th century artists correspond with the sign linguistics of tantra art. Tantra retains an age old groundwork revived and foreseen by the modern artists of the entire world. The artworks of numerous 20th century abstract artists like Paul Klee, Constantine Brancusi and Piet Mondrian have very remarkable resemblance with the mystical characteristics of tantra art. During the 1960s and 70s, in the contemporary art of India, tantra was an imperative entity providing pictorial linguistic along with signs and symbols, shapes and designs for the creative pleasure and the patriotic approaches of the working artists of that time.

As can be observed, for the exception of a few artists such as Ravi Verma, Indian art right from ancient sculptures and cave paintings, folk art to the 20th century, the Indian artists had always avoided plain imitation and the obsession with anatomy, perspective and shadows, which was much prevalent in Western art until the development of modern art. However, pure abstraction in post-independence India owe much to the developments in both Indian and the Western art and aesthetics over the years to get to where it is today.

Plates



Plate 3.1: Bodhisattva Padmapani, Ajant caves, 5th century.

Image Source: metmuseum.org

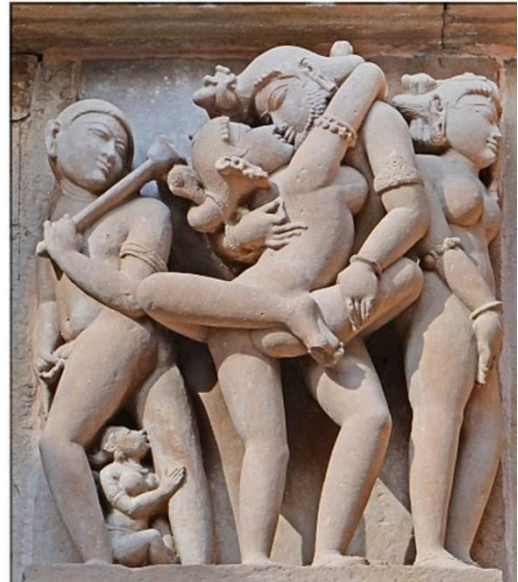


Plate 3.2: Khajuraho sculpture, c.885

Image Source: wikipedia.org



Plate 3.3: Nude Group, Amrita Sher-Gil, oil on canvas, 1935, (81*115.5 cm)

Image Source: webology.org



Plate 3.4: Diagram of Shri Yantra

Image Source: ciis.edu



Plate 3.5: Nataraja, bronze, 12th century

Image Source: wikipedia.org



Plate 3.6: Discobolus, marble, c. 450 B.C.E.

Image Source: brown.edu

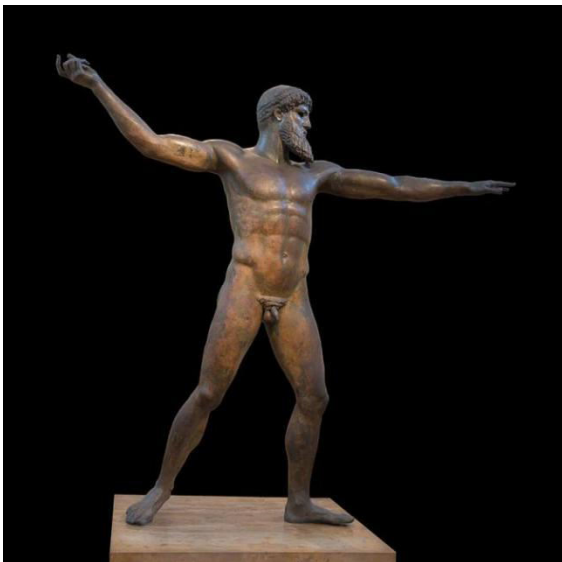


Plate 3.7: Statue of Zeus or Poseidon, bronze, c. 460 B.C.E.

Image Source: ancientrome.ru

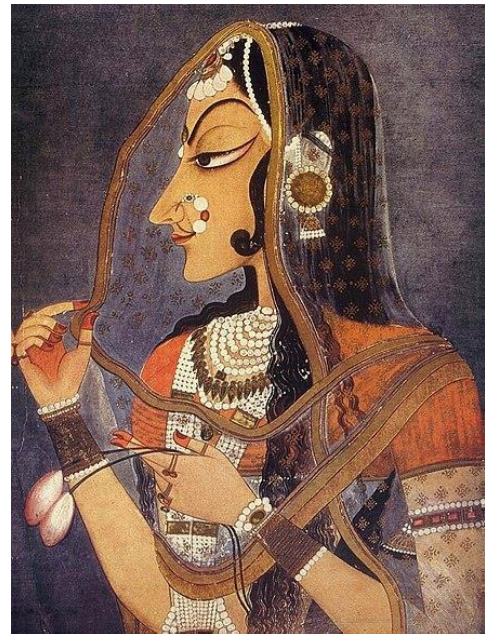


Plate 3.8: Bani Thani, Nihal Chand, c.1750

Image Source: wikipedia.org



Plate 3.9: Shakuntala, Raja Ravi Verma, oil on canvas, 1898, (110*181 cm)

Image Source: wikipedia.org

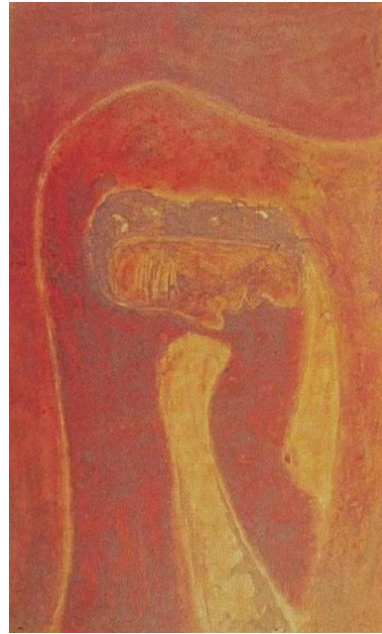


Plate 3.10: Brooding, Rabindranath Tagore, Ink on Paper.

Image Source: Mago, Pran Nath. *Contemporary Art in India: A Perspective*. National Book Trust, India, 2001.



Plate 3.11: Bharat Mata, Abanindranath Tagore, watercolor on paper, 1905

Image Source: wikipedia.org

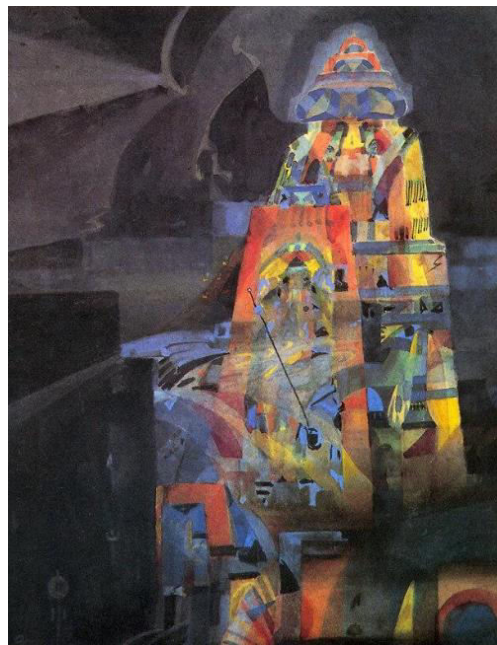


Plate 3.12: Temple Cubistic, Gaganendranath Tagore, wash and tempera

Image Source: artworkonly.com



Plate 3.13: Bride's Toilet, Amrita Sher-Gil, oil on canvas, 1937

Image Source: artandculture.google.com



Plate 3.14: The Fatal Blow (Tarakeswar Affair), 1873

Image Source: wikipedia.org



Plate 3.15: Mother and Child with St. John, Jamini Roy, gouache on canvas, 1940, (71*91 cm)

Image Source: Khanna, Balraj., Kurtha, Aziz. *Art of Modern India*. Thames and Hudson, 1999.



Plate 3.16: Mill Call, Ramkinkar Baij, 1956.

Image Source: aaa.org.hk

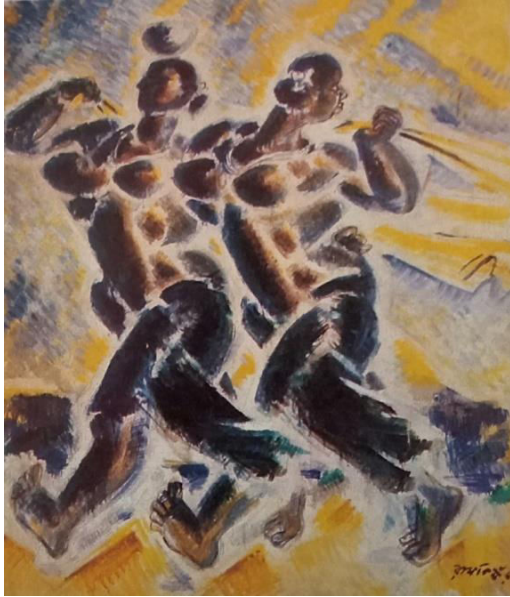


Plate 3.17: Call of the Mill, Ramkinkar Baij, oil

Image Source: Mago, Pran Nath. *Contemporary Art in India: A Perspective*. National Book Trust, India, 2001.



Plate 3.18: Bridal Tonga, M.F. Husain, gouache on paper, 1953, (27*40 cm).

Image Source: Khanna, Balraj., Kurtha, Aziz. *Art of Modern India*. Thames and Hudson., 1999.



Plate 3.19: Urdu Poetry Series, M.F. Husain, watercolor on paper, 1984, (35.5*52 cm).

Image Source: Khanna, Balraj., Kurtha, Aziz. *Art of Modern India*. Thames and Hudson., 1999.



Plate 3.20: Kalateet, J. Swaminathan, oil on canvas, 1978, (82*116 cm).

Image Source: Khanna, Balraj., Kurtha, Aziz. *Art of Modern India*. Thames and Hudson, 1999.



Plate 3.21: January, Biren De, oil on canvas, 1992, (111.8*96.6 cm).

Image Source: artnet.com

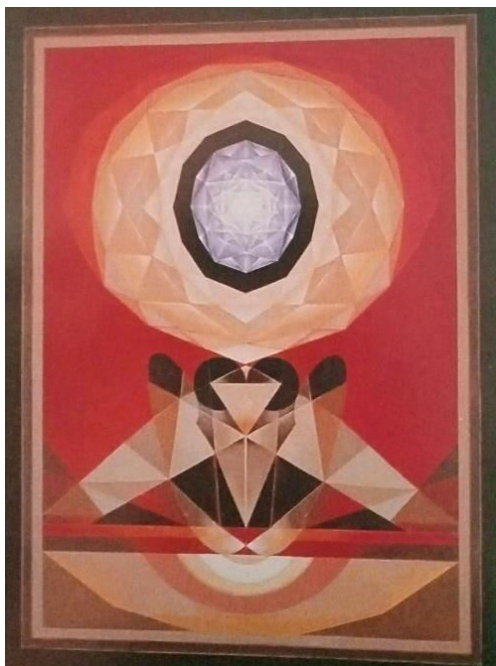


Plate 3.22: Agni, G.R. Santosh, acrylic on canvas, 1994, (61*74 cm).

Image Source: Kaul, Shantiveer. *The Art of G.R. Santosh*. Roli books.



Plate 3.23: Pakriti, S.H. Raza, acrylic on canvas, 1999, (148.6*148.6 cm).

Image Source: saffronart.com