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Mind, Man and Nature: In the Art of V.S. Gaitonde, Ram Kumar and Laxman Shreshtha

4.1 A Study of Abstraction in the Serene Canvas of V.S. Gaitonde

Vasudeo S.Gaitonde is one of India's most significant abstract artists. Gaitonde's supernatural and diverse paintings evoke an obscure description of the natural world. Ancient calligraphy and Zen philosophy influenced him profoundly. In his paintings, conglomerated and controlled structures and patterns are finely depicted [288].

His independent mindedness was accompanied by a firm belief in his identity as a painter. Most commentators on Gaitonde's work of the 1950s mention Paul Klee as a major influence in his works. The thin and yet somewhat mischievous lines and the peculiarly lyrical play of colors must have been a derivative from Klee. Gaitonde's most impressive quality was the quiet tonal harmony of his abstract works. These arrangements possess what might be called animation. He managed to make each construction in color, an organ that has its own internal harmonic life as seen in his untitled works. As one observe the paintings of Gaitonde's more, we find floating recurring forms which the artist has executed spontaneously while applying his colors [Plate 4.1]. As they run through the canvas, these forms knit together by a very strong logic which works two ways that is confirming an internal relationship endowed with a spinal quality and managing a confrontation with the area of pure paint [289].

Observing the works of Gaitonde of the 50s, one can notice a structural assemblage of geometric patterns which is reminiscent of Klee's work [Plate 4.2, Plate

4.3 and Plate 4.4]. There is very little representational elements such as in the untitled painting of 1952 [Plate 4.5], where he has introduced a sort of fish, bird or insect like figures and a black figure of some sort of animal. However, these figures are vaguely recognizable as any form of species in nature and are far from imitating anything in the real world for the sake of imitation. Instead, combined with abstract background with bright colors and unrecognizable shapes, the painting seems to dive more into a realm of fantasy fashioned from his own inner intuition void of any sort of intellectual elements much like of the work of Klee.

According to Nadkarni, it seems that Gaitonde was influenced by a particular phase in Klee's career rather than by his whole entire oeuvre. The thin, mischievous line and the peculiarly lyrical play of colors must have been a derivative from Klee. Gaitonde grasps the lyricism, and the linear imitation soon paves the way for an engrossment with calligraphy and hieroglyphs. When there are mentions of influence from Klee, one should also take into account that there should be similar influences in the works of painters like Kandinsky and Miro [290].

His work also embodies the serene stillness that he always sought after. Looking at his paintings, one begins to fathom the feeling of the infinite expanse of time and space indicated by the perceptual confluence between sea and sky. Kolte also stated that the horizon captivated Gaitonde's imagination, We experienced this duality of simultaneously existing on the horizon and viewing the same, miles away from us. It was probably this play of experiencing infinity that pushed Gaitonde back into the womb of that imaginary, evasive line [291].

One of his biggest sources of inspiration was the sea which is indicative of the deeply immersive experience of his abstract works. Gaitonde's exhibition: *The Silent Observer* showcases his works ranging from figurative to abstract works. It was titled *The Silent Observer* because of how important silence was to Gaitonde's process. Therefore, the curator of Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation, Kamini Sawhney states, So while you look at his work and immerse yourself in its silence, take a moment to ponder- is Gaitonde the silent observer of life, or is it you, silently communicating with his art [292].

For one to appreciate Gaitonde's paintings, one cannot rely on any conventional approach. There is no representation of faces, proportionate or distorted, no landscapes, neither impressionist nor realist images are there to see. It is also void of any socio-

cultural comment which was prevalent in the Ajanta paintings nor can one identify Gaitonde's work with that of the Tantric art or Indian miniature paintings. There is no depiction of birds, mountains or trees which are the objects of everyday life that unconsciously impress upon one's mind and seek to recognize or refer it to other man-made forms [293].

Dengle states that, while observing the works of Gaitonde, one realizes that color, form and textures themselves become the reference points for the visuals. He names them reference point only because in the infinite universe of visual arts, it is these reference points that acquaint us with the painting that is before our eyes. But after that first acquaintance, even these references prove inadequate. The moment the color is applied on the surface of the canvas, it becomes material and along with that starts the struggle of the human mind to enquire what each of these element mean, and to find the meaning in that color. Neither the painter nor its spectator can be separated from a painting. Both of them communicate with the painting at certain levels which are independent of each other. During this communication, the painting is rediscovered, granting a higher, more profound aesthetic experience. Hence, one must keep in mind that Gaitonde's painting is neither born of intellect nor intentionally from true-life experiences. Furthermore, it does not have its origins in a prolonged process of memorizing art skills that were practiced in history. It is in fact, the natural, effortless crystallization of a consciousness of life in entirety. Gaitonde's abstraction does not rise from a material source nor seeks to pass on any message or idea. It is neither an endeavor to initiate any social revolution nor a compulsive defence of art through any associations bearing significance of social responsibility [294].

His works from the 60s shows a departure from the usage of solid and rigid geometrical structures and instead renders a softer, more calmer and serene form. The tones are significantly duller and there are no more bright colors. The colors are dulled down into slightly greyish tint and hard boundaries are no longer found. The color seems to merge with one another disappearing and reappearing in a subtle manner. The paintings are reminiscent of a calm landscape which was painted from memory each holding their own secrets, and its own independent laws. As also mentioned before that the sea was of great influence to him, some of his paintings of this period [Plate 4.6, Plate 4.7, and Plate 4.8], reminds the viewer of the sea and its horizon along with the sky. Some solid rigid abstract structure floats below the horizon which is reminiscent of ships, port or may be

even a lighthouse. By not clearly presenting these forms as actual solid representational objects such as an actual ship or lighthouse, the obscurity maintains the mystical element in his work. It is almost like Gaitonde introduces the viewer into a realm of his own creating while at the same time still very familiar to the viewer.

Dengle describes Gaitonde's paintings as a rhythmic dance that is performed by colors around each other to discover themselves. It is called dance because of the paintings' rhythmic movement. It sometimes instantly turns inward to examine itself in utmost peace. Even after the first acquaintance, the paintings possess an ability to have a personal communication with the spectator. One is coerced into seeing these paintings over and over again and marvel in the waves of experience that rise and fall within one's mind. They are emblem of timelessness [295].

Gaitonde was never attracted to the Bengal School. He was not drawn to the intricate designs in their paintings. He found more appeal in the emphasis given in Western Modern paintings on color and composition. The intellectual environment that held sway after the Industrial Revolution suited his frank and no non-sense nature [296].

The essays in *An un-stretched canvas* include an article by Dengle, *Gaitonde- A Painter* in the *Ruchi* magazine published in 1998, there is a direct quote of Gaitonde which states,

We had discussions on Van Gogh, Cezanne, Gauguin in J.J. Rather than saying that I was influenced by Paul Klee, it should be that I was drawn to the wondrous forms, colour combination, beauty of line drawing in his work. Temperamentally, I found this compatible ground work for my painting. When painting in watercolour or oil colours, it was as though I was Paul Klee myself. However it would be incorrect to say that I was painting like him or imitating him. Imitative work is always mediocre and ordinary. I was a painter and was painting with the ease of a painter. Consequently, I outgrew Paul Klee and that happened quite naturally too. So there was never a planned direction to my work, nor had I ever set myself any definite ideals or role models and tried to paint accordingly... [297]

Just as Gaitonde's art started developing an individual characteristic form during his years at J.J. his personality seems to have been profoundly influenced by Zen. As the

painter in him was attracted to Klee, he was impressed by the entirety of thought in Zen ideology. His thought process was developing along with his observations about Zen. It would be but unlikely if this did not reflect in his work [298].

In the catalogue of Gaitonde's exhibition *V.S. Gaitonde: The Silent Observer* which was exhibited from 3rd August to 3rd November, 2019 at the Jehangir Nicholson Gallery, Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation, a significant section written by art critic, Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni on the works of Gaitonde is included. According to Nadkarni, the role of Zen in Gaitonde's art is likely to be exaggerated. He mentions that Gaitonde is not the type of painter to wait for either, an emotional influence or a philosophy to prompt him. If one studies the art of Gaitonde of the last three decades or so, it was relentlessly drawn towards a state of contemplation. It is not to say that he discovered Zen, but rather that there was an unavoidable confluence between a way of thinking and a mind ceaselessly exploring its relationship with the external world. Concerning Zen, it is said that it leaves "the open space to be filled in by the mind." Zen believes that even the humblest of things, when meditated upon, can arouse the most astonishing intuitions, even in a moment. Even the edge of a leaf, a bit of crumpled paper, can stimulate the greater intuitions of understanding or of beauty. From this perspective, the spectator of Gaitonde's work may venture to identify the mystifying pattern, the profoundly individualized hieroglyphs with manifestations of such intuitions [299].

Such individualized hieroglyphs could be observed in the latter phase of his career, especially that of the 80s and 90s [Plate 4.9 and Plate 4.10]. Instead of the landscape-like forms from the 60s, this phase of his career shows images that are constituted by strange and subtle shapes which are reminiscent of hieroglyphs.

While observing the works of abstract artists such as Gaitonde, intuition seems to play 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 to 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.

4.2 Transcendental Lyricism in Ram Kumar's Abstract Landscapes

Ram Kumar is another one of the most significant figure in the post-independence art scenario of India. Ram Kumar learned art from the Sharada Ukil School of Art and later on ventured to Paris and studied under Fernand Leger and Andre Lohte. For Ram Kumar, his main concern was the human condition that manifested in his early works. In his turning point, the lines became sweeping strokes and swashes of blue and golden yellow rendering a sense of buoyancy to the painting. During the early 1960s started abstract painting after a crucial journey to Banaras and thereafter he never returned to figurative painting after that. Starting from 1960, his works were carried out in sweeps slashes of viridian, ochre and aquamarine, as he started exploring the cosmic cycle of creation, disintegration and regeneration. He also worked with figurative abstract like *The Dream* [Plate 4.11].

Ram Kumar's landscapes often hangs between the boundaries of abstraction and naturalism, not giving in to either of them. He maintains a palette of colors which includes aqua, blues, grays, and warm brownish yellows. His primary motifs reflect between his numerous visits to Benaras and the open vision that are in essence artistic footsteps of his life's journey. By getting rid of the figures he was able to express the void of humanity, and make use of architectural structures and landscapes as a kind of metaphor representing psychological and cultural ideology. He transforms and molds the landscape in to a network of lines, shapes, patterns and blocks, approached with texture and tone, renders the distribution of significant subject over the pictorial space as observed in his paintings of 'Benaras' of 1960s [Plate 4.12, Plate 4.13, Plate 4.14 and Plate 4.15]. The most intrinsic thing about Ram Kumar is his hard bold horizontal line. He had stated that his art is about the re-observing and the rediscovery of elemental origins within the language of the landscape, the transformation and expression of energies and the sacred properties of meditative melancholy [300].

During the 1980's with his broken patterns, Ram Kumar expressed an advancing violence and destruction. His later landscapes are not representational image of a particular sight, but it was rather a complex hybrid and mixture of memories and flashbacks fused with actual sights that he visited over the years. Even though with all the mystical lyricism of his landscapes, Ram Kumar was never someone to be attracted to the unearthly realms. He was always firmly rooted to reality. His abstractions are not a

medium to express the unknown but like dynamic beams of light they move, passing through the entire pictorial space of the painting, moving from one portion of reality to another, unraveling the mystical relations, between the sky, the land and water [301].

Ram Kumar outgrew the influence of Leger under whom he had studied art in Paris during his twenties. The significance and strength of his latter works is manifested by the sense of serenity that presides over it which is a result of his return to the roots [302].

Ram Kumar remains one of those very few Indian artists, even perhaps the only one, whose paintings of the last fifty years manifests a testimony of man's estate, his agony and loneliness, his search for freedom and the ultimate acceptance of the world as it is [303].

Observing the dynamics in the works of Ram Kumar, it is possible to analyze his work from different perspectives. As observed, 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 [Plate 4.16 and Plate 4.17]. 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.

During the past recent years, when Ram Kumar was asked by the interviewers the reason of why or what made him abandon human figures in his later paintings, his replies have been varied and antithetical. According to Nirmal Verma, Perhaps the reason has

something to do, not with some random obsession with abstraction for its own sake, but rather a profound discomfort with human figure itself. Human figure deprived of human emotion is some kind of anomaly. It is denial of the self. While not explicitly denying the existence of the ‘self’, he refrained from limiting it to the anthropological scale of the human body [304].

By liberating it from the human confines, he as an artist attained a kind of liberation which he had never achieved before, the freedom to universalize the resentful feeling of human suffering such as loneliness and orphan hood. Simultaneously, he did not want to diffuse it either. In the search for such freedom, he discovered it in the image of the city landscape. This discovery would have long lasting profound influence and impact on much of his later works. The landscapes that he now started to paint was abstract only in the sense that it entirely abandoned the human figure, but simultaneously, they were solid and discernible enough to have the city as its main motif [305].

For Ram Kumar, as an artist, sometimes the real is unveiled in a negative way, through the realization of what is unreal. Regarding this Verma states, And what could be more unreal than to divide reality between its ‘abstract’ and ‘representational’ forms? Even more delusive is the attempt to identify the ‘human’ with the representational and ‘non-human’ with the abstraction. Where else the wisdom of the multi-faceted nature of ‘reality’ could be gained except in the city of Shiva, who himself has many faces? To reduce it to one fragment of reality or the other leads as much to the devaluation of what is divine as to the debasement of what is human. If much of the modern abstract art seems so sterile today, it is because in the process of liberating the ‘reality’ from its human context, it also divested it from its divine connection, what Kandinsky was to call “the spiritual in art [306].

Spirituality in Ram Kumar’s painting is attained not by painting the ‘sacred’ but in prevailing over the splits and rearrangements of the profane, man-made world. It is exactly in this ‘prevailing over’ that Ram Kumar managed to “look beyond and to look within [307].

From 1962 to 1965, abstraction and expressionism happened to attain varying significance, if this did not actually take turns in Ram Kumar’s paintings. If he had been leaning more towards gestural painting, in which the style is more flowing and calligraphic, it is conceivable that abstract expressionism would have been the style he

would have developed. Ram Kumar decided to produce his images from both kinds of backdrop by the late 60s [308].

This backdrop consists of his late figurative period, and of the early figure-less abstract landscapes period. He used the abstract forms of his figurative period, and the textural impression of his landscape period. He combined the disparate messages and imagery to synthesize them into one significant, meaningful unit. This synthesized expression, which bear in it the abstract dilemma of man and the palpable feel of the living landscape, distinguishes the style of his recent paintings, and actually forms its very substance [309].

The condition that neither figurative nor representational element is manifested in the forms of an abstract work need not essentially suggest that an artist like Ram Kumar efficiently and methodically create an abstract painting which completely abstains and detaches itself from what has been experiences of the past and valid expression of the past [310].

A similar pattern in the representational and expressive aspects in Ram Kumar's abstract landscapes could also be observed in the works of artists such as Van Gogh in his painting *The Starry Night*, in which the distorted and expressive usage of colors and forms mold the physical objects of nature into an object which is expressive of human emotions. The same pattern could also be observed in many other modernist work of art such as Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. 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.

The paintings from his third phase from the 90s turned towards the landscapes of the Himalayas. Containing the cosmic within the boundaries of a miniature frame, the spiritual inside the materiality of loaded pigment and decisive brushstrokes, the works lean towards the sublime, the visionary landscape [Plate 4.18, and Plate 4.19]. The spectator wanders homeless into the cosmos, and at the conclusion of the arduous journey, the artist reveals to the spectator of a realization that unlike the alluring mirage, exalts by its manifestation [311].

When he distorts and re-expresses the motif, he does not merely replicate the visible. The spectator acknowledges his contemplative frames exactly because they have moved from the perceptual to the conceptual, from semblance to structure. He does not hold up a mirror of reality, but treats it to prismatic analysis. His landscape, for instance is a diagram of forces in a field rather than a scenic post-card view. Each city is a conglomeration of views from different angles, arranged on the same picture plane for the discernment of the viewer [312].

4.3 Contemplative Attributes in the Abstract Paintings of Laxman Shrestha

Laxman Shrestha's paintings hang between the boundaries of representation and abstraction. A Nepalese artist, living in India, he is another one of the most significant abstract artists of India. His style of abstraction is a rendering of his memories of landscapes with a combination of wandering into unknown places. His paintings also evoke a strong sense of tranquility from the viewer as well through his melancholic and mystic renderings of the soft tonal structure of the paintings. Much like Ram Kumar, his abstracts were also derivatives of landscapes along with his own emotional perception of it [Plate 4.20, Plate 4.21, and Plate 4.22]. The abstract properties of nature inspired him. His works are also both sensuous and meditative in their balance of color and provokes a deep sense of serenity to the viewer. In his struggles in life coming from an aristocratic family to a struggling student, all of these series in his life made him embark on a spiritual journey which is well reflected in his work. He sought to seek some of the answers of life existentialist philosophies of the West and later on to the Upanishads and

Buddhism. His works reflect all of these ideologies that he learned throughout the years [313].

Shrestha started out as a figurative artist before moving on to his large abstract canvases for which he is acclaimed for. He states, "I went to abstract art through landscapes. Maybe I missed the mountains of Nepal or the expanse of the Himalayas. I thought that could be captured only on a bigger space, and that's why I started painting large canvases". He further states, "Abstract is the end result of painting. The tendency of an abstract artist is to be reticent. Reading, listening to music, silence is the main ingredients. In silence, you find what you have been searching for [314].

During Shreshtha's early days as a student in Sir J.J. School of Art, on the weekends his fellow students would pack their paints and sketching boards in order to go off and paint landscapes in the *plein air* style of the impressionists. This marked the starting point of Shreshtha's abstractionist endeavor. Initializing with the clouds and skyline before his eyes, he would distort and move the masses, displacing accent and perspective [315].

Shreshtha's works often evokes a deep sense of stillness intricately balanced with unexpected chaotic movement, indicative of a rhythm of nature and life. In an article by DNA India, he states,

My work often tries to relive the dynamic, changing mountainscape, light and shade and tranquil. The unpredictable weather is an inspiring element". He differentiates between the figurative painter and abstract painter by stating that the figurative painter's approach is more often, led by some form of a guide whereas an abstractionist would avoid or forsake any guides. He states that the beauty of being an abstract artist is the thrill of walking into the unknown faced with surprises and hurdles. He further differentiates the figurative painter and abstract painter and states, "I believe that the abstract painter finds his answer within the inner realms of mind. It is a path which leads inwards, deeper and deeper, until he finds that silence within and his source from there. For a figurative painter, the story or narrative matters, hence his answers may lie in social interactions of many kinds but he too would need some time in silence to piece it all together. [316]

The very first thing that spectators notice about Laxman Shreshtha's paintings, regardless of period, medium or scale, is their expansiveness. Each of his paintings yearns

for the vastness and magnitude of the sky. Whether it is through the harmony of color or the muted scales of black, white and gray, he welcomes the viewer into his canvas to venture into the enigmatic space between the realm of sensory particulars and the realm of interiority where he performs his enchantments. Throughout the course of his oeuvre which lasted more than fifty years, he has involved himself with the essential paradox of abstraction, the same paradox which his Western counterparts such as Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian involved themselves with [317].

To the casual viewer, what seems to be merely a formal play with the properties of pictorial composition, or lyrical gestures confined within a two-dimensional space is actually the physical remnants and evidence of a spiritual struggle to cleanse one's faculties, welcoming the viewer to advance beyond the claims of a world of compromised choices, and to channel one's consciousness and being, beyond the naturalized constraints imposed by historical conditions [Plate 4.23, Plate 4.24, and Plate 4.25]. Displayed at the art gallery of Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation and curated by Ranjit Hostoke from 18th August to 3rd October, 2016, and the second phase from 14th October to 31st December, 2016, *The Infinite Project* is a celebration of Laxman Shreshtha's work tracing a retrospective arc from the 1960s to 2016 [318].

Shreshtha's abstract canvases profess the human will to unite the chaos of life into a graceful order by casting wide the net of imagination and arranging the incoherent pieces of experience together into a coherent unity. Non-representational in nature, these paintings reinforce the value of mystery and transcendence as the central focus of Shreshtha's endeavors. Music plays an essential, even formative role in Shreshtha's works. A significant number of paintings developed as ripples around an area of color that affirms itself profoundly, or as resonance propagated by a fascinating mark on the surface. Much like in the manner of a musical composition, his paintings lean towards the composition of a specific mood. They move towards the creation of a domain of contemplation, where time itself is held and molded by the fragile grasp of an invisible structure. According to Hostoke, The Sanskrit aestheticians would have without a doubt acknowledged in these paintings the subtleties of *bhava* [319].

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.

Intensity is an essential property in Shreshtha's work. It achieves its most solid formal expression in his bold use of color. However, Shreshtha does not allow himself to be completely tempted by the colourists' carnal pleasures. Instead, he maintains equilibrium between color against the engineer's more ascetic preoccupations. Taking shape as they do in the fluid space between memory and expectation, the forms in his paintings act as a bridge, connecting memorized and idealized landscapes of memory on the one hand, and with the unspecified destinations of the imaginative enterprise on the other [320].

The resultant tension between consciousness and experience becomes a significant theme in Shreshtha's work, and the landscape itself is simply the prelude, the visible and phenomenal key to this and other underlying themes. The landscapes in his paintings is a fleeting subject which vanishes, leaving behind the remnants of residual, figurative forms, a distorted remnants of what might have been trees, or the curve of a sinking road [Plate 4.26, Plate 4.27, and Plate 4.28]. His paintings also acquire their formal logic from the opposition between revelation and concealment. Hence, it is limiting and even fallacious to comprehend Shreshtha's paintings simply as withdrawal from the landscape. Sustained by genre but not confined by it, Shreshtha crosses the boundary between representation and abstraction, self and landscape, history and apprehension [321].

Abstraction is a term assigned to the visual representation which derive their physical appearance from objects in nature but are distorted and simplified, or broken down into simple forms which are rearranged in a way that the artist fancies, thereby, expressing himself in the process. Abstraction is a progression with changes starting from almost naturalistic representation to semi-abstraction and then pure abstraction where all the forms are completely unrecognizable at this stage. It does not associate the viewer to any kind of natural objects previously experienced. It is entirely imaginative and not a description from anything visually perceived by the artist. The components of the picture plane and the structures are organized and treated entirely in a personalized manner without sticking to the laws of physical objects [322].

Shreshtha states that his paintings never begin as blueprints, but as a network of possibilities. He further states that when he begins, he does not ask himself too closely of what he wants. He starts in order to find out where he wants to go. The external world of sense impression such as mountains, trees, reflections in water is of great significance to Shreshtha. However, for him, paintings are spiritual exercises through which he attempts to express the intangible, those subtleties which cannot effortlessly be named in shapes or words. For Shreshtha, the landscape is always a prelude, a limp exterior envelope of forms that becomes charged with a parallel reality. This otherworldly reality which is termed as *alaukika* by the Sanskrit aestheticians is the illumination beyond the boundaries of the world [323].

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 the listener as well. Coomaraswamy and the Tagores' view about artistic activity as a form of spiritual activity or spiritual discovery is much relevant when studying the works of the Indian abstract artists such as V.S. Gaitonde, Ram Kumar and Laxman Shreshtha. Through the process of abstraction, the absolutely personal and expressive forms are manifested which Rabindranath Tagore regards as an instance of spiritual bliss.

Plates



Plate 4.1: Untitled, V.S. Gaitonde, oil on canvas, 1995

Image Source: rediff.com



Plate 4.2: Cycle Location, V.S. Gaitonde, oil on canvas, 1953, (31*32.5 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.3: Untitled, V.S. Gaitonde, oil on canvas, 1958, (72*47 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.4: Untitled, V.S. Gaitonde, oil on canvas, 1958, (91.5*91.5 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.5: Untitled, V.S. Gaitonde, gouache on board, 1952, (52*57.7 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.6: Untitled, V.S. Gaitonde, oil on canvas, 1963, (182.9*106.7 cm).

Image Source: artsy.net



Plate 4.7: Untitled, V.S. Gaitonde, oil on canvas, 1962, (155.5*206.5 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.8: Untitled, V.S. Gaitonde, oil on canvas, 1962, (155.5*206.5 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.9: Untitled, V.S. Gaitonde, oil on canvas, 1985, (101.6*76.2 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.10: Untitled, V.S. Gaitonde, oil on canvas, 1995, (153*102 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.11: The Dream, Ram Kumar, oil on canvas, 1958, (65*53.5 cm).

Image Source: livemint.com

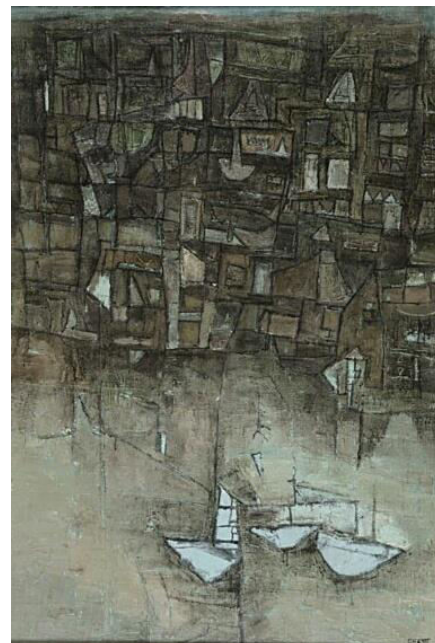


Plate 4.12: Untitled (Benaras), Ram Kumar, oil on canvas, 1963.

Image Source: knma.in



Plate 4.13: Untitled (Varanasi series), Ram Kumar, oil on canvas, 1963, (82.55*125.7 cm).

Image Source: auctions.bidandhammer.com



Plate 4.14: Varanasi, Ram Kumar, oil on canvas, 1965, (63.5*88.9 cm).

Image Source: Vadehra Art Gallery



Plate 4.15: Benaras, Ram Kumar, oil on canvas, 1967.

Image Source: Vadehra Art Gallery



Plate 4.16: Mazes of the mind, Ram Kumar, oil on canvas, 1961, (60.9*142.2 cm).

Image Source: Vadehra Art Gallery



Plate 4.17: Varanasi, Ram Kumar, oil on canvas, 1969, (88.9*88.9 cm).

Image Source: Vadehra Art Gallery



Plate 4.18: Detail from Landscape, Ram Kumar, oil on canvas, 1993, (83.8*139.7 cm).

Image Source: Vadehra Art Gallery



Plate 4.19: Landscape, Ram Kumar, oil on canvas, 1991, (83.8*63.5 cm).

Image Source: Vadehra Art Gallery



Plate 4.20: Untitled, Laxman Shreshtha, oil on canvas, 1976, (172.5*192.5 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.21: Untitled, Laxman Shreshtha, oil on canvas, 1981, (172.7*193 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation

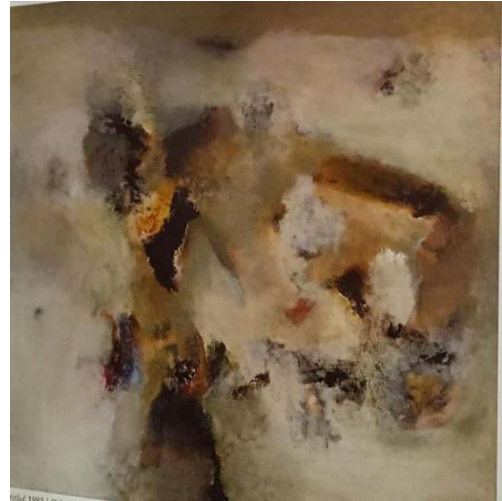


Plate 4.22: Untitled, Laxman Shreshtha, oil on canvas, 1983, (127*127cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.23: Untitled, Laxman Shreshtha, oil on canvas, 1984, (114*114 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.24: Untitled, Laxman Shreshtha, oil on canvas, 1984, (152*152 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation

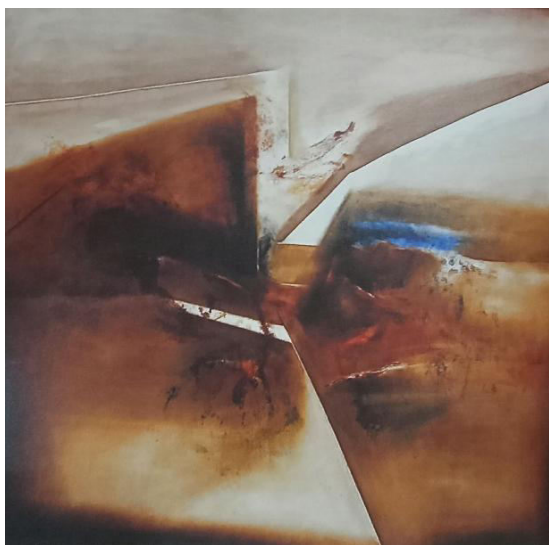


Plate 4.25: Untitled, Laxman Shreshtha, oil on canvas, 1985, (152.2*152.2 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation

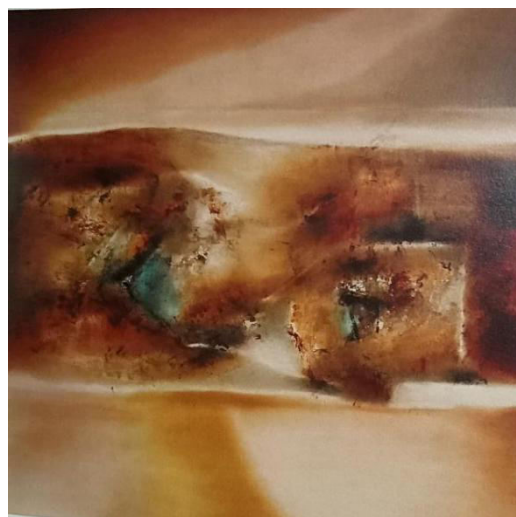


Plate 4.26: Untitled, Laxman Shreshtha, oil on canvas, 1986, (152.2*152.2 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation



Plate 4.27: Untitled, Laxman Shreshtha, oil on canvas, 1987, (127*127 cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation

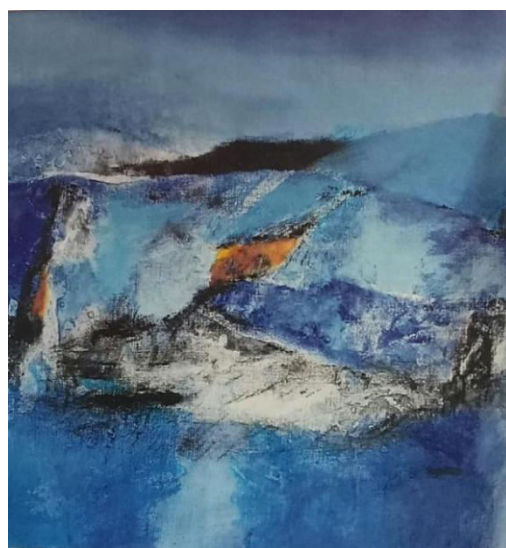


Plate 4.28: Untitled, Laxman Shreshtha, oil on canvas, 1993, (60*60cm).

Image Source: Jehangir Nicholson Art Foundation

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