

CHAPTER 7

MODERN ART AND ARTISTS

During the decade of 1940, as a reaction against the conservative tradition of the Bengal school and inspired by the fresh ideology prevalent in the West, many artists formed new art groups in order to express themselves freely through new mediums and styles. Out of these groups the most important ones which made an impact were the Calcutta Art Group, Bombay Pag Group, Shilpi Chakra etc.

CALCUTTAART GROUP-

The Calcutta Art Group was established in 1943 by Pradosh Das Gupta and Nirode Mazumdar. Pradosh Das Gupta had studied sculpture in Britain and was motivated by an active organisation named 'London Group'. On his return to India he founded the Calcutta Art Group along with artists like Nirode Mazumdar, Paritosh Sen, Gopal Ghosh, Hemant Mishra, Prankrishna Pal and Sunil Madhav Sen, with an aim to uproot the old school of thought, beliefs and mediums of expression and gave a new definition to art as modern artists. This new visual definition also reflects the genus of modern intellectual environment.

The initial works of the members of the Calcutta Art group manifested the influence of western artists like Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Henry Moore etc. But later on these artists developed their own styles. This group was also supported by writers and poets of the left wing. The main exhibitions of this group held in 1943, 1944, 1945, 1947 and 1953 were commended by the art critics as well as the contemporary artists and inspired by them several new groups came into existence. This group was active on the national scene for a decade between 1943 till 1953, after which it became inert as the artists started working individually and privately. This group made an extraordinary contribution in incorporating the new international art concepts in the Indian art scene.

PROGRESSIVE ART GROUP-

The decade of 1940 was most important for the development of Indian art. While a few artists were working on the Bengal style, the works of other artists reflected the western influence. During this decade the artists of Mumbai started new experiments. In 1947 artists like Souza, Raza and Ara wanted to break free of the revivalist nationalism established by the Bengal school of art and encourage an Indian *Avant Garde* engaged at an international level and founded the Progressive Artists Group (PAG). The members of this group were Ara, Souza, Raza, Bakre, Gade and Hussain. The artists of this group also expressed themselves by publishing articles in various magazines and papers. This group held its first exhibition in the year 1949 which attracted not only artists and art critics but also people from all walks of life.

Their art works were bought not only by art critics like Hartwell, Rudi Van Leyden, Hermann Goetz

etc. but also western art collectors which gave them fame and recognition at the international level. The members of this group also travelled to the foreign countries regularly and hence came in contact with and were influenced by the various international art movements. Their works depict the synthesis of influences from Indian art together with Cubism, Post-Impressionism and Expressionism. Each artist developed his own individual style.

New members like V.S. Gaitonde, Krishna Khanna, Akbar Padamsee, Tyeb Mehta and Ram Kumar associated with this group after 1949. These artists were much influenced by the Western artists like Picasso, Matisse etc. The artists of this group were the torch bearers of progressive stream in the Indian art scene. Progressive art group also for the first time established the artists in art market. Even today the artists belonging to this group sell their works at very high rates. After 1953 this group became less active as the artists became more active individually instead.

SHILPI CHAKRA:

With the motto, “Art illuminates life”, Delhi Shilpi Chakra came into existence on 25th March 1949. It was founded by B.C.Sanyal and Dhanraj Bhagat. The artists who later on associated with Shilpi Chakra were Harkrishna Lal, K.C. Aryan, Dayamanti Chawla, Dinkar Kaushik, Jaya Appaswami, Srinivas Pundit and Brijmohan Bhanot. In its manifesto the Chakra proclaimed, “The group recognizes that art as an activity must not be divorced from life; that the art of a nation must express the soul of its people and ally with the process of progress. The group recognises that the artists have come together to work hard towards the progress of art and through art help build a virile national culture and brighter light in the country.” The membership of chakra was restricted to working artists, but writers, musicians, poets, critics and dramatists, who shared the chakras views were welcome to associate with its activities.

To propagate the contemporary art the members of Delhi Shilpi Chakra organised various exhibitions of their works in Chandni Chowk, Karol Bagh, University Campus etc. in 1949. The seminars and exhibitions organised by the Chakra got a very good response. Cartoonist Shankar Pillai organised a conference on cartoons and drawings at Masonic Hall. Gradually the Chakra expanded and many new students and artists took its membership. Out of all, the significant names were Devyani Krishna, Satish Gujral, Ramkumar, J.Swaminathan, Rameshwar Baruta, Rajesh Mehra, Vishambhar Kumar, Jugmohan Chopra, Anupam Sood, Paramjit Singh and Arpita Singh.

The Chakra tried to build an agency that would provide a professional base for the sale of the art work of its members. Therefore, with the assistance of Ram Babu of Messers, Dhoomi Mal Dharam Das, an art Gallery, the first of its kind in India, was inaugurated on 7th Oct. 1949 at Connaught Place in Delhi. This was a pioneering step by Delhi Shilpi Chakra in promoting the art and artists' interests.

The main aim of Delhi Shilpi Chakra was to examine the system of the art institutions by organising effective activities and programmes. Efforts were made to improve the quality of work. Art work was presented before the artists with the intent of open and creative discussions on them. The Chakra believed that art and culture belonged to all, and that the artist had a role in bringing the message of creative experience to the people and that the artist himself could grow through the developed art awareness among people.

With a new enthusiasm and expression in modern styles the artists of the Chakra captured the imagination of young progressive artists. But many artists of the Chakra wanted to synthesize their art with the traditional Indian art. They brought forth the social realities through their creations. Propounding the social importance in their creative expression, the contribution of the Delhi Shilpi Chakra artists in the development of Indian contemporary art has been very significant.

Important Modern Artist:

Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal : (1901-2003)

Bhabesh Chandra Sanyal was born in 1901 in Dibrugarh (Assam). Ethnically the Sanyal family belonged to Shrirampur (West Bengal). After completing his studies from Shrirampur College he associated himself with non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi. The desire to become a painter brought him to Government School of Art of Kolkata in 1923. Sanyal shifted to Lahore in 1929 and lived there for the next 18 years. There he taught at the Mayo School and set up his studio by the name of Lahore Lalit Kala School, which became the centre of the art activities and many exhibitions were held there.

After the partition of India, he migrated to Delhi in 1947 and established the 'Delhi Shilpi Chakra' along with a few other artists. Sanyal also worked as the professor and the head of department in the fine art faculty of the 'Delhi Polytechnic'. Sanyal also travelled to America, Canada, Europe, Japan etc. and participated in many national and international art exhibitions.

Sanyal's works are an interesting fusion of traditional with the modern. He experimented with various mediums in painting and sculpture. A few of his notable paintings are The Beggars of Gol Market, Head of Shiva, Rajasthani Woman, Self Portrait, and the Kangra Woman.

WOMAN OF THE KANGRA VALLEY-

This painting depicts simplified forms with sparkling colours. The woman has been painted in the primary colours of red, blue and yellow. The other colours like orange and green give a fresh look to the painting. (PLATE 1)



PLATE 1 WOMAN OF THE KANGRA VALLEY

NARAYAN SHRIDHAR BENDRE (1910-1992)- Narayan Shridhar Bendre was born in Indore (M.P.) on 21st August 1910. He graduated from the Agra University in 1933 and studied art under the famous teacher D.D. Devlalkar. He pursued and got a diploma in art from Bombay in 1934.

He worked at the visitors' bureau of Kashmir from 1936 to 1939 and made various sketches and paintings of Kashmir Valley. After that, he started working as a freelance artist in Mumbai and made many portraits, murals and many illustrations based on stories. He also taught art to many students during this phase. He also worked as an art director of a film in Madras. Bendre received a gold medal from the Bombay Art Society in 1941. He got the Patel trophy in 1946 from the art society of India. Later he was chosen as the president of this society.

His first solo exhibition was held in Mumbai in 1943. During 1947-1948 he travelled to America, France, Holland and Belgium gaining exposure to the original works of modernist masters. He also worked in graphics in New York.

After returning to Bombay in 1950 he again displayed his works in a solo exhibition. After that he

moved to Baroda as the first reader and the Head of Department at the Faculty of Fine Arts. He later on became the Dean of the Faculty. His watercolour landscapes are the most attractive of all his works, in which his brush has been very powerfully used. Although he made paintings in different patterns, his colours were the most important factor in each painting. Hairdo, Sunflower and Female Florists are the most notable paintings of Bendre. In his painting



PLATE 2 FLOWER SELLERS

Female Florists, he has depicted the women using extremely attractive and vibrant colours, with baskets in front of them filled with lotus flowers. Their hand gestures are casual and seem to be talking to each other. **(PLATE 2)**

K. K. HEBBAR (1912-1996)- Kanttigeri Krishna Hebbar was born in 1912 in a village named Kanttigeri in the South of India. Right from his childhood he was influenced by the beautiful ambience, festivals, events, dances and songs, games and colours and beauty of the toys, that made a great impact on his art. His paintings were a portrayal of vibrant colours of village festivals he observed during his childhood.

Later on he studied at the J. J. School of Art, Mumbai and came in contact with the Western style. Dissatisfied with it he went on to study Indian Rajput, Mughal, Ajanta and Bagh cave paintings and was much influenced by them. He depicted the scenes of the rural life with powerful strokes. Despite living in Mumbai he made paintings of fishermen, flower sellers etc.

Hebbar also travelled to Europe and studied the modern western art. Influenced by it he depicted Indian in Western style which can be seen in his paintings of Cock Fight, Village Well (Panghat), Monk and Open Air Market (Haat Bazaar). Extremely rhythmic and dynamic lines are a speciality of Hebbar in depicting the dance poses and figures etc.

From 1956 to 1958 Hebbar continuously received Lalit Kala Academy National Award. In 1976 he received the fellowship of Academy and in 1989 he was honoured with *Padmabhushan* award by the Government of India.

COCK FIGHT- Cock Fight represents the new experimental style of Hebbar. This painting depicts that one cock has wounded the other, the wounded cock is bleeding and a few of its feathers are broken. The cocks have been painted in light colours and the people watching in background have been painted in dark colours and lines. This painting is also a satire on human society and position. **(PLATE 3)**

K. G. SUBRAMANYAM (1924-2016)- K. G. Subramanyam was born on 5th February 1916 in

PLATE 3 COCKFIGHT



Kerala. He got his initial education from Presidency College, Chennai. Interested in art he sought admission in Kala Bhavan, Shantiniketan in the year 1944. There he was under the tutelage of Binode Bihari Mukherjee and was his favourite student. During the decade of 1940 he also actively participated in the freedom struggle of India. He believed in the Gandhian ideology. He participated in many solo and group exhibitions in India as well as abroad. In 1951 he became a lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the M.S. University of Baroda for a long time after which he went to teach at Shantiniketan. Subramanyam has also written extensively on Indian Art. A collection of his articles 'Moving Focus' was published by the Lalit Kala Academy in 1978. 'The Living Tradition' was another of his much discussed book, which elaborates his views on art. Besides painting, K.G. also worked with wood, fibre, cement and terracotta. He also made murals and toys. He took a deep interest in the development of handicrafts. The prestigious award 'Kalidasa Honour' was bestowed on him in 1982. According to Vinod Kumar, "K.G. created harmony in everything, be it portrait, or use of canvas, or murals, illustrations or toys." In 2003 the National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi (NGMA) organised a retrospective exhibition. K.G. did many experiments with abstract style also. The terracotta relief painting, glass painting and acrylic sheet paintings are also some of his most important works.

IMPORTANT PAINTINGS-

WOMEN- K.G. has composed figures using abstract cubistic style. Many tones of a single hue are seen in his paintings. He has also experimented with various tones of a single hue and simple geometrical forms in the painting 'Women'. (PLATE 4)

JAGDISH SWAMINATHAN (1924-1994)- J. Swaminathan was born on 21st June 1928 in Shimla. He was a member of the Communist Party of India till the decade of 50's. For many years he also worked as a journalist and an art critic. He studied art in Delhi and Warsaw (Poland). In 1963 Swaminathan founded the 'Group 1890' which earned a big



PLATE -4 WOMEN



PLATE 5 COMPOSITION

name in the Indian Art World. This group was inaugurated by Pundit Nehru and the famous poet and ambassador of Mexico, Octavio Paz had written the catalogue of its exhibition. Swaminathan also edited the magazine named 'Contra' which was an art magazine of historical importance. Swaminathan's works were admired very much in the first Triennale Exhibition (1968) of India. He also got Nehru Fellowship in 1968. Swaminathan was also very active in the organisational aspect of

art. In 1969 he was also a member of the jury of the Sao Paulo Biennale. In 1982 he established 'Rupankar' (Bharat Bhawan) in Bhopal where both Modern and Primitive art can be seen together. Swaminathan worked and resided both in Delhi as well as in Bhopal. About his own expression in art, Swaminathan himself commented in 1978, “Behind this expression is possibly the experience of having grown up between mountains. Technically I do not experiment with classic geometry in painting-space, but I use curves in which trees, shadows of birds themselves decide their own place and time. Still they do not disturb the two dimensional aspect of the canvas. This concept philosophically is close to my spiritual instincts and binds me to my cultural past.” The colour scheme of Swaminathan is very attractive and the lines very delicate as is evident in his paintings that yellow and orange tones have been charmingly used. In the mountain-like geometrical forms Swaminathan has generally depicted a small bird. (PLATE 5)

A. RAMCHANDRAN-

A distinguished artist of contemporary Indian art Ramachandran was born in 1935 in Kerala. After completing his M.A. in Malayalam literature, he went to Shantiniketan for admission and got a diploma in Arts. There he got training in the company of Nandalal Bose, Binod Behari Mukherjee and Ramkinkar Baij. After completing his studies, he came to Delhi and taught at Jamia Millia. Ramchandran worked in all mediums including painting, mural, sculpture, drawing, printmaking and watercolors etc. He wrote and painted books for children. His paintings were exhibited in many national and International Exhibitions and he received many awards. He was also made a fellow member of Lalit Kala Academy. Ramachandran made many paintings on Indian mythological narratives. Besides these he also depicted the various aspects of ordinary life with spontaneity. *Kali Puja*, *Yayati*, *The End of Yadavas* and *Urvashi* are his famous paintings.

LOTUS POND-

Lotus Pond is an attractive painting by Ramachandran in which blue, light yellow and white colours have been used. The flowers and leaves of lotus have been brought to light with soft lines. The depiction of butterflies, crickets and other insects make the painting decorative. Ramachandran has depicted human figures animatedly and attractively in ornamental forms. In the painting *Nayika*, the heroine and her friend have been beautifully painted. The foreground and background has been painted texturally in the tones of green. The flowers and leaves of trees have also been depicted ornamentally. (PLATE 6)



PLATE 6- NAYIKA

IMPORTANT POINTS

1. The progressive artist group was established in 1947 by Souza, Raza Ara, Hussain, Bakre and Gade.
2. “Shilpi Chakra” was established by B. C. Sanyal in 1949 in Delhi.
3. The Calcutta artist group was founded by Pradosh Dasgupta and Nirode Mazumdar.

4. These art groups inspired the Indian artists to experiment as an organisation.

EXERCISE QUESTIONS

VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Give the full form of PAG.
2. Who established “Shilpi Chakra”?
3. Who established the Calcutta Art group?
4. Name two paintings of K. K Hebbar.

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Name the artists of Progressive Artist Group.
2. Write about the paintings of N.S. Bendre.
3. What do you know about J. Swaminathan?
4. Write about the art of A. Ramchandran.

ESSAY TYPE QUESTIONS

1. Describe the origin and development of Calcutta Art Group.
2. Elaborate the styles of any three representative artists of your choice.