RADICAL POLITICAL COLLECTIVITY IN MODERN INDIAN ART: THE EXPERIENCE OF INDIAN RADICAL PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS ASSOCIATION

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

JAYASANKAR. B.

CENTRE FOR LINGUISTICS AND ENGLISH
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
1995

जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI - 110067
CENTRE OF LINGUISTICS & ENGLISH, SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES

CLE/SL/JNU July 1995

CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "RADICAL POLITICAL COLLECTIVITY IN MODERN INDIAN ART: THE EXPERIENCE OF INDIAN RADICAL PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS ASSOCIATION, submitted by JAYASANKAR. B. in PARTIAL fulfilment of requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (M.Phil) of this University, is his original work and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this University or of any other University to the best of my knowledge.

(PROF. ANVITA ABBI)
CHAIRPERSON

(DR. FRANSON D. MANJALI)
SUPERVISOR

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my Supervisor Dr. Franson D. Manjali, Assistant Professor, Centre for Linguistics and English (C.L.E.), School of Languages, for his constant support throughout the period of this work. I remember also the support given by the entire faculty of the C.L.E.

Many people helped me with their critical support. But to be fair their names must remain anonymous at this stage.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

"I am well aware that I have never written anything - but fiction. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is, therefore, absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fictions to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bring it about that a true discourse engender's or `manufactures' something - that does not as yet exist, that is, `fictions' it. One `fictions' history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one `fictions' a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth."

Michel Foucault

In the following pages, what I have modestly attempted is to look into the possibility of a political art within the context of contemporary Indian art practices. For that I have focused on a small group of artists who organised themselves into an artists collective (Indian Radical Painters' and Sculptors' Association) and tried to develop an aesthetic and political practice which they perceived, given their socialist concerns, should be outside the discursive site of mainstream Indian art institutions. The group existed between 1982 and 1989. In order to emphasize their importance and failure, I have followed a method which is largely historical. It is my contention that only by mapping out the institutional structure and ideological terrain of modern art in India, the specificity of this

group can be comprehended in an intelligible manner. The absence of a violent and passionate art practice in India (except for the singular case of Ramkinker Baij) in our near past and contemporary times has to be investigated with much more sophistication and wider knowledge which is anyhow not attempted here.

The first Chapter focuses upon the formative era of modern Indian art in late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It would marginally engage the question of colonialism and its effects on one hand and the ideological and historical concerns and reasons behind the institutionalisation of modern art in India under a regulating ideal of "Tradition". This Chapter would also include an introductory ground for a sustained critique of Ananda Cumaraswami's scholarly practice in the area of Indian art.

In the Second Chapter in order to get a closer critical understanding of contemporary Indian art practices (especially since Independence), I have chosen two representative short documents on Indian Art and have subjected them to a critique. Short observations on the artists who are sighted as exemplary by those documents are made to make the picture more clear. One of the documents, a historical appreciation of modern Indian art by Geeta Kapur for presenting to the Royal College of Art, England, in connection with Festival of India, England, is written in 1982. But it is my contention that the basic premises of the author had never changed after that except for to

make that argument up-to-date. Examples are her own "Notes on the 100 year's of Modern Indian Art" exhibited in the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, in 1993-94 or her latest article "When was Indian Modernism" in the Journal of Arts and Ideas, March 1995. The second document, a "confession" by Ashish Rajyadhyaksha is by far the most esoteric and pretentious statement on modern Indian Art, I have ever come across. However, a close and contextual reading of it will be revelatory with respect to the structure of modern Indian Art.

The third Chapter is a historical positioning of the Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors' Association. Then I have discussed the aesthetic significance of the work of K.P.Krishnakumar. A concluding remark is made in the end.

I have added three appendices: (i) The article by Geeta Kapur; (ii) The article by Ashish Rajyadhyaksha, and (iii) The catalogue of the Group published in their Baroda exhibition. The photographs of the work of K.P. Krishnakumar. I have discussed in the third Chapter is also placed in the end of the dissertation.

CHAPTER I

PRODUCTION OF ART IN INDIA : AN INTRODUCTORY REVIEW

CHAPTER I

THE PRODUCTION OF MODERN ART IN INDIA : AN INTRODUCTORY REVIEW

> The eye is not merely a mirror
> but a correcting mirror.
> The eye should make it possible
> for us to correct cultural errors.
>
> Frantz Fanon.

In order to attempt an understanding of the production of modern art in India, in this Chapter we will engage with two fields which are irreducibly interrelated. (1) a corpus of works of art which are placed in the register of modern Indian art; and (2) the critical discourses that govern, authorise and authenticate, the actualisation of these productions under this very register, and the broad negotiations between these two fields, which problematise the field and thereby render an order and intelligibility with a prudent claim to truth of varying degrees to the constituent elements of the field.

Historically these two registers are the creations of 19th century[1] and is implicated within the material happenings in the Indian sub-continent of that time viz., British colonialism and the effects it produced on different classes and castes in India. To be more concrete, the creations for the conditions of a modernist

nationalism, the emergence of a distinct class known as the Indian bourgeois, the nature and substance of the Indian freedom movement, the forms and strategies - including the multiple languages - it developed to negotiate with the colonial power on one hand and the other forms of consciousness and resistances existed in India.

Forty years of discontinuous research produced within the boundaries of different disciplinary practices on the colonial era has failed to give a solid ground to comprehend Indian colonialism as such which in turn highlights the paradoxically complex nature of colonialism - thereby condemning any student to a miserable state of vulnerability to some or other of colonial discourses as such.[2]

It seems that one of the most important tenets of modern India's historical research is the construction of past as the pre-history of the present by which a positivist historicism is permanently placed to the forefront, which understandably rescues the researcher from any confrontation and engagement with the post-colonial situation and at the same time this gesture guarantees a degree of innocence to the post-colonial state.

Now the unfolding of history without references (i.e.

without closures and openings) like a fatalist drama operated by a transcendental stringpuller at one hand and the history as the pre-history of the present on the other hand where the present is only a stage for the enunciation and comprehension of the past are two sides of a binary opposition which guarantee and stabilize each other with remarkable intelligence.

To be sure the contradictions of history can be intellectually grasped only by situating oneself solidly in the present but armed with a visibility to go beyond the present but not squarely embracing a future.

> "The so-called historical presentation of development is founded as a rule, on the fact that the latest forms regard the previous ones **as steps leading upto itself** and since it is **only rarely and only under quite specific conditions able to criticise itself** - leaving aside, of course, the historical periods which appear to themselves at times of decadence - it **always conceives this one sidedly**"[3].
>
> For example "The Christian religion was able to be of assistance as reaching an objective understanding of earlier mythologies only when its own self criticism had been accomplished to a certain degree....Likewise, bourgeois economies arrived at an understanding of feudal, ancient, oriental economies only after the **self-criticism** of bourgeoisie society had begun."[4]

Coming to modern art in India, insights to the historical construction of this institution can be grasped only to the extent one has the understanding of the contemporary art practices, the discursive field which

generates and controls the production, i.e., the dominant ideological territories in which it is situated and conditions: the galleries, connoisseurs, collectors, critics, learned journals, promotional literature (in short the market), the academies and other art institutions under the control of State or in the guise of autonomous and disinterested stamps, the cultural policy of the state, the needs and uses to which art production is broadly assigned. But as the present cannot reveal the present, and as any understanding of the present is politically impossible without a minimum degree of clarity of the past structurings, that much historical description would be attempted in this chapter.

A standard narrative of modern Indian art would start with the emergence of a distinct archive of visual production known as the 'Company School Paintings'[5] (most of them would lament upon the second-rate quality of the European artists whose practices and guidances the native artists tried to master); the art activities initiated at the colonial metropolises by the East India Company and the impact of western education,[6] the J.J. School of Art founded in 1857, Bombay; the setting up of twenty-two schools of art in 1867[7] to train the needed draftsmen for the colonial administration and to produce designs for industry from the

repertory of rich but declining craft tradition of India,[8] the formation of a curriculum known as the South Kensington academic style[9] the heroic emergence of an artist like Ravi Varma (the agonies and desperate struggles of a native artist to master the medium of oil paint, to gain recognition from the much feared and institutionalised European artists working on Commission in India)[10], the deep and unwanted indulgence of Indian artists in decadent European academics showing a perverse neglect for Indian traditions, the benevolent efforts of some European scholars and Indian intellectuals like E.B. Havel, Sister Nivedita, Aurobindo, A.K. Coomaraswami etc., to protect the onslaught of European influences of native artists alongwith the emergence of Indian nationalism: Then the search for an Indianness culminating in the Bengal School of Abanindranath Tagore and his disciples-[11] (which would be celebrated/elevated as a radical break) providing a historically profound vision for the art practices of India[12] , slowly ebbing into a should have been avoidable revivalism, the short but enduring presence of a prodigy -- Amrita Sher-Gill[13], the passionate and conscious plea of Rabindranath Tagore for a wider universalism, a correct blend of East and West - accompanied by parallel visual production, the establishment of Santiniketan[14], radically different visual output of Ramkinker and Binod Bihari, the

partial attempts by the Calcutta group[15] and the like, the appearance of the Bombay Progressive Artists Group (1948) whereby the still hitherto fragile modern Indian art attained a maturity[16] and comes to its own showing a boldness to claim a universalism (i.e. parity with contemporary European idioms) by 1960's and early Seventies many regional schools like Baroda, Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Madras etc., international styles like New Figurative Art, Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, Socialist Realism, Pop Art etc., firmly establishing itself on Indian ground and the Indian artist 'freely' experiments, innovates, and creates with these 'free flowing currents', the canonical 20th century names like Picasso, Matisse, Dali, Mexican Muralists, Brancussi, Klee etc., becomes conventional reference points alongwith odd references to Mughal Miniatures, Chinese landscapes, Japanese prints and scrolls, tribal and folk art. But even in this tide of internationalism and universalism modern art in India is remarkably tradition bound[17] and keeps the well preserved trait of 'Indianness' and after Independence, the plastic art also generally operates within the broad social and cultural paradigms of 'Tradition-Modernity' a logo that has become a methodological apparatus of its own.

What is remarkable about this narrative schema is its complete synchronisation with the biography of the Indian State as such. For the biography of the Indian state would also begin with Western/English education, European ideals of State, nationhood, the pains and agonies with which the Indian Intelligentsia wrestled to acquire English education, civil services, equal opportunity, science and technology, the reformation and revitalisation of Indian tradition, nationalist ideology, the assertion of selfhood and self-rule, the prevalence of free spirit after independence. In short the struggles, sacrifices, fortunes,and rewards in the path to become and stand as a modern state.[18].

Indian colonialism at any rate beyond a mere simplistic reading was not a mere conquest and rule (like that of the America or Africa) even though and rule of gun was the dominant feature of the colonial process. Nor was it a mere collaboration, betrayal or the like by a section of the Indian ruling class. It seems that colonialism can be now better understood as a broad negotiation where the discursive patterns and priorities would evidently change from one field to other but a minimum consistency and surveillance is ensured by their changing mechanisms of discursive priorities from discipline to discipline. We should emphasize that it is not colonialism per se that is

crucial or in another way it is not the truth content of the colonial claims that is important or to be refuted with alternative claims of truth (contrasting, pre-colonial India with colonial India; in order to demystify colonial claims of superior cultural and social mechanisms and civilizations one has to mystify pre-colonial India). But what is crucial is the effect that colonialism produced and actualised. Not as something which falsified the `truth' of India but as something which manufactured truth itself including the `truth of India'. In this way the Indian colonial process as such, the whole discourses produced for and by colonialism is to be viewed as a `production of truth'[19] In this manner what is important is to distinguish between those discourses which were solely produced for colonialism and those discourses which were produced by colonialism and locating the nodal points of the interrelation, and the interceptions of these two discourses. In short the mutual transactions carried out by these two discourses.

Modernity would be treated as the world view of the bourgeois. This includes the self criticisms of the bourgeois also. Indian modernity as such is a modernity actively mediated by colonialism.[21] This means that the germinal site of this modernity has to be located with respect to the emergence of the Indian bourgeois as a

specific class articulating itself (a bourgeois which is trying to come to terms with itself, exhibiting and propagating its view of itself as the general vision of society) on the one hand and on the other hand the discourse through which this project is envisaged and actualised. The specific character of that modernity would be at resonance with the class character and political project of this bourgeoisie.

Indian art as we know now i.e. an art with a distinctive 'Indianness' as a mark from Mohanjodaro-Harappa (Indus Valley civilization) spreading to and cumulatively enlarging to the "Aryan" forms incorporating the Brahmanic Buddhist, Jain, Gandhara, Gupta, Pallava, Chola, Pandya etc., at one hand and another mode of classification based as regional identities like South Indian, Bengal, Western Indian, Himalayan, North Indian etc., at another hand, yet another mode of taxonomy like Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, Indo-Greek, Islamic, Indo-Islamic, Mughal, Rajputhana and Pahari, Basholi, Madhubhani, Mithila, (conventionally known as the folk) is essentially a 19th century-early 20th century discovery/invention.,[22]. The debates and anxieties around these discoveries in which European and Indian intelligentsia found themselves along with the dominant historical imaginations of 19th century, crystallised into

a canonical classification of Indian art into Ancient, Medieval and Modern (a category that was yet to figure out at this time). This temporal division conspicuously spared the folk, tribal and other marginal art forms. A consensus vision of civilization and time was established where forms standing outside the civilizational construct was condemned to reproduce and multiply the same in order to survive or to vanish altogether from historical scene.

The historical imagination about India which took dominance by the end of 19th century and inherited by the 20th century was that of an Ancient India which was civilizationally pure (and if regenerated can become once again the leading light of India, Asia and even the world which is being contaminated by the devil of Industrialization) where even the caste system as a pure form existed and was/is a desirable social institution, which was later on contaminated by untouchability and superstition but can be redeemed, a Medieval India with all the splendour and despotic moments for which it owes its share to Ancient India, which like the `dark ages' of Europe full of conquest, religious despotism, bigotry - an era which forgot the genealogy but still by and large an unchanging life for a large population with a village system, craft economy and a consciously chosen decision for

a simple and honest life as such. And colonialism which with all its vices and brutalities equipped India to a modern age, which gave visibility to India, made India self-conscious about herself and her glorious past; in any case colonialism as a general period for self-conscious introspection, undoing the past errors and gaining energy to progress (and at the same time regaining the ancient glories) to a rewarding future. This vision of India which owes considerable indebtedness to colonial and nationalist historiographics is the core narrative of bourgeois historiography in India. Later on a substantial level of self-criticism was added within this narrative-pattern which made this imagination more and more intelligible and acceptable.[23].

So many individuals, institutions, contesting ideologies and scientific apparatuses, took part in this grand project with mutually conflicting beliefs, intentions and urges, carrying with them notions of disinterested knowledge, power, accommodation, tolerance and containment, racial superiority, evangelical and civilizational missions etc.[24] But it might be argued that there was no mutually antagonistic contradictions regarding this broad historical imagination about India except for explanations to limited historical time span, say an archeological site like the

Gandhara sculpture[25] , Mahabalipuram temple complexes[26], the birth and death of a monarchy like the Rastrakutas[27], the spread of Brahmins to South India[28], codification, historical and textual analysis and explanations to some scriptures and Puranic tales. The breadth and inner vitality of the craft traditions, the good and evil of industrialisation, the desirability and rejection of a modernist ideal etc., which never challenged or subverted the narrative coherence of this (bourgeois) historical imaginations but transferred all these sub-texts into autonomous narrative/historical spaces which in turn guaranteed the necessary internal mobility essential for the survival and secret dominance of the meta-historical imaginations.

Perhaps the most important knowledge systems that informed, drew the boundaries and reassured colonialism's visibility was colonial anthropology/ethnology. As a discipline whose fortunes grew along with colonial conquest and actualization of colonial rule's stability, anthropology and ethnology found itself emerging out of the obscure and perverse travelogues, voyages, unpleasant narratives about coy customs, manners, eating habits, dress patterns, rituals etc., to a proper academic discipline by and around 1850s in England drawing strict and fluctuating vectors about

civilization, barbarisms, savage and culture.[29] "The sole justification for the institutionalisation of anthropology as a serious discipline in England was that the production of that disciplines are useful for colonial rule."[30]

In India long before colonialism we had our own rigid and hierarchical vision of closed boundaries, traversing every realm of life namely caste and gender. Colonial anthropology, caste and gender collaborated each other mutually exchanging their privileged points, constituting a new subject, which privileged the already privileged institutions, structures, individuals and texts. James Fergoossen writing in 1856, wrote that there is a close connection between ethnography and architecture in India. Two different sets of people "inhabiting practically in the same country and worshipping the same Gods under the guidance of the same Brahminical priesthood should have adopted and adhered to two such dissimilar architectural styles for their sacred buildings (he was discussing the two different architectural styles of two adjacent temples at Puttadakal) shows as clearly as anything can well do how much race has to do with these matters and how little we can understand the causes of such contrast, unless we take affinities or differences of race into considerations."[31] and also his perverse judgment of Indian architecture, " the

architecture of the country may be considered as a great stone book in which each tribe and race has written the annals and that in a manner so clear that those who run may read"[32]. Our modern visibility, axiomatically rehabilitated old oppressive visions, made it new and scientific and protected it with truth.

II

The visual archive that emerged out of British colonialists' vision about India was a conscious activity spanning almost two and a half centuries, starting with sketches, drawings and illustrations produced by early British artists who travelled in India, the production of historical writings about India, especially the histories of Indian art and architecture[33] the erecting of first colonial buildings in Madras by Lord Clive (1798-1803) and Calcutta by Lord Wellesley (1798-1903)[34]. The hierarchical ordering of space in sites of colonial power (Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, Madras and the capitals of princely states spreading all over India), the incredible number of photographs to document and classify the 'real India'[35] including its flora and fauna, the tribes and castes, ruined monuments and other exoticisms, the identification of Mughal architecture as an ideal form from which an architectural style to represent the Empire in the full majesty, splendour

and power resulting in the actualisation of the architecture of New Delhi by 1930-35[36] known as the Indo-Sarasine architecture. This vision, as we have stated above was conditioned by colonial anthropology which reinforced the history of Indian people as a past civilization, and the knowledge that rationalised that vision was produced by privileging the scriptures of India as the sole authority which conditioned Indian beliefs and living patterns[37] and the imperialist criterions and motives to rule, civilize and to justify the same claims.

The first British professional artist to tour India extensively was William Hodges (1744-97)[38] to be followed by Thomas Daniel and William Daniel who together published the most influential `oriental scenery' (1795-1803)[39] a six volume work of water colours, drawings and etchings. This was followed by hordes of travelogues and illustrations such as Fanny Parks's `Wanderings of a Piligrim in Search of the Picturesque' (1850), C.K. Forester's `A Picturesque Tour among the Rivers Ganges and Jumna'. They travelled alongside the conquering British army and capital to draw the rudiments of decaying monuments, hostile mountains, wild and fresh vegetation, feeble and sterile people involved in pagan religious practices, people travelling through long and narrow country roads, people travelling to and from some

mythical points of solace, drawing comfortable equations fuelled with anxiety (an anxiety about future) - anticipating the colonial narratives of Kipling, Forster etc., between a decaying past (civilization) a growing vegetation and dangerous mountains which has no order and a population which is fragile and dissolving which neither belonged to the past or present nor a future. The future always belonged to Europe or as Macaulay put it bluntly `Indians in appearance and Europeans in mind'.[40]

In the public buildings built up by the Raj it was essential always to make visible Britain's Imperial position as ruler for these structures were charged with the explicit purpose of representing the empire itself. The notorious sculptural ornamentation of the Whitehall in the India Office building representing "Indian tribes, an Afghan, a Goorka, a Malay, a Maratha and so on"[41], really tells the relationship between India and Britain as envisaged in the colonial matrix. The sculptural ornamentality of the colonial office building offered an allegorical commentary on India and Britain. A recent historian on colonial Indian architecture writes; "The center piece was Britannia in Roman garb, seated upon her throne surveying her realms from high above (In those times when Britain was emerging as an Imperial power by

controlling the whole seawaves of the world, it was desperately searching for an ideal representation to exhibit itself and in that search among the residues of a `Western' - a category which was solidly entrusted and made true by that time - past found one in Imperial Rome (and Greece*) and clinged to a mythical genealogy where on the other side the British were `barbarians' for the Greek and Romans) with the British Lion and unicorn at her side. Ascending her were classical figures representing knowledge of enlightenment and power. In this tableau as in India Office sculpture one can read clearly the messages of the empire: that Britain ruled by conquest as the statues of soldiers and "stateliness" made manifest and also by understanding the Indian figures as the pediment attested. To rule one had to master, by ordering and labelling, that one had conquered; to know was in some means, already to rule"[42].

One of the early statues erected by East India Company Government In India, namely, that of Lord Cornvallis the Company's Governor General (1785-93) placed in the background of Calcutta Town Hall built in Roman Empire style of architecture, was intended to personify at one and the same time an ancient European power, which had subdued part of Asia and a modern nation which felt itself strong enough

---

* The bracket is my addition.

to do likewise. The statue was an attempt to define colonial rule in a juridico-military and civilizational garb. In short an act of colonial self-assurance and justification commanding a genealogy from Antiquity to an enlightened present through a steady progression.[43].

The distinctively colonial style of life and cultural equation that marked the hundred years of colonialism is epitomised in the domestic architecture form, namely, the `Bungalow' which combined strategies of pleasure, scientificity, power and social distinction; an architecture form preferred by the colonial officials, Zamindars, Landlords, social reformers and so on. In short, an architectural form which makes us conscious about the complexities of the nature of the deployment of power within the colonial matrix. (Historically the Bungalow was devised out of the thatched-roof houses of Bengal and they spread to all British colonies with a tropical climate and on the other hand Bungalow as an architectural form is absent in England except for some holiday resorts.) The principal colonial vision about India was well expressed by Lord Valentine when he wrote that "India is a country of splendour, of extravagance and of outward appearance; that the head of a mighty empire ought to conform himself to the

prejudices of a country he rules over". So that this land is "to be ruled from a palace not from a counting house; with the ideas of a prince; not those of a retail dealer in muslin and indigo".[44].

What is most distinctive about modern Indian art is its total indebtedness to the academies and institutions of art that was established and nourished by colonialism and later on by the Indian state. In the colonial era the pedagogy was totally based on Victorian naturalism and classicism, which was embedded within a complex mesh of morality-discourse, romantic-sentimentalism, notions of purity and taste and a concept of beauty and forum which permitted only the exaltation of a conservative world view. By its very nature the academic art practice was a mechanical process where all enquiries to life forms, colour, volume and depth was prohibited and a Victorian draftsmanship, closely similar to 19th century photographic realism was idealised and presented as Art, so that in the colonial matrix, the Indian artist for his own survival has to change due to the particular historical trajectory, but he could change only to be a poor practitioner and imitator of an academic art which was forcefully imposed, nourished and kept alive for reasons that were outside the concerns of art.

With the establishment of official art schools like J.J.School of Art and various other art institutions, in all parts of the country, and the penetrations of British artists and their Indian counterparts to all the princely states of India, change in the modalities of art practices in India was almost complete. Along with it the colonial rewriting of history and the invention of a tradition (the material necessities and facts for that was also produced in that time. For instance, Ajanta and Ellora caves were discovered only in 1819, the Archaeological Survey of India with a strong bias for the scriptural history of India also was instituted, the documentation of Indian architecture and coins will also fall into this period) was also being actualised.

Another important factor that has to be seriously deliberated is the diagonally opposite position against modernism and modern art adopted by the leading figures of art and criticism in Modern India. This is partly because of their ideological conditioning within the knowledge produced by the orientalist scholarships.[45] Partly due to their attachment and over-indulgence in the Art and Craft movement of England[46] which incidentally had lost its ground

in its home and was looking towards India as a potential site to reaffirm their theories and to produce practical effect. (The most assuring affirmation of Bengal School came from England[47]). But most important was the conservatism of the Art field as such which was fearful to step outside the four walls of one's own house (which was miserably shrinking) with dignity and what they most desired was at best a sameness with a difference. Also the relative hostility with which the British art establishment viewed modern art[48] must have also played an important role in conditioning the visions about art in early twentieth century India.

The directives that the Bengal intelligentsia took in and around 1900 in plastic arts particularly in painting led by E.B. Havell, Sri Aurobindo, Sister Nivedita and the Tagore family[49] which is widely known as the Bengal movement is now acknowledged and a reaction and response to the decadent practices dominant in Indian art field under the guardianship of photographic realism and studio paintings. But it was also a conscious project to ground the visual production in that `visual laws of the East', tradition (understood as a scriptural and Brahmanic aesthetics)a tradition that carries unchanging and universal laws and truth against a modernity which is a fleeting movement

without any solidity) and nationalism (understood as a pan-Indian identity). But apart from engaging the issues of the predicament of modern art in India, on the level of actual production, what emerged was a species of paintings which was deeply embedded within the upper caste/upper class ideology and world view.

The visual productions of the most acclaimed painters of Bengal School, Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose would help us to clarify this proposition. Even though Abanindranath detested realism and its deceptive appearance, opted to convey the feelings and 'essence' his production would squarely fall into the dominant concerns of his period: Mother India, Shahajahan (reinvesting the glories and tales of an indigenous Imperial past against the present decay and foreign rule) and at a more personal level expressing the emotional agonies and disturbances about the decline of the age old aristocratic conventions and structures of feelings, a class in which he was also a member. Especially in his landscapes where the fading colours and the gloomy aura of decay instantaneously convey the feelings of a slow but unwanted decline. Moreover the very flatness of his canvass which instantaneously denies any volume or materiality of the object, which opposes the idealist essence of the object resulted in the emergence of

a style where any real confrontation with the object, thereby the transformation of the object was never undertaken.

Nandalal Bose, the most prized disciple of Abanindranath Tagore (and Gandhi also) should be credited as the most successful artist to accomplish the role as the iconographer of a neo-Hindu political mythology. It is not that he painted the Hindu pantheon like Siva, Krishna, Arjuna or he converted the Buddha into the framework of an emerging pan-Indian Hindu vision, but it is the very language-which later on became the official language of all neo-Hindu movements in India - that is our concern. It is said that Nandalal as a man and as an artist had instantaneous love for the `little traditions'[50], the folk, the village craft and art. But in his visual production, the `little traditions' had no conflict with the 'Larger Tradition' which arguably enough is full of political connotations. That love never got objectified with the historical trajectory in which these `little traditions' found themselves but was a mere repertory for the appropriation of `higher traditions' - a political project which would in turn silence the life of that `little traditions' apart from keeping some external decorations which would in turn become the exhibiting ornaments of the

`higher traditions' to prove its magnanimity. The Haripura Congress posters (1938) which is praised by all nationalist art critics itself is the best example. In this posters the Indian village with all its happy movements is represented without any materiality except as a nationalist population carrying out the daily laws of living advocated by Gandhi.

Starting with the publication of his book on Medieval Sinhalese Art in 1908, upto 1947, Ananda Coomaraswami was the most vocal promoter and widely acclaimed scholar on Indian Art. Even though he was very suspicious about Modern Art as such, he had strong sympathies with the Bengal School of Painters and is generally respected as a voice who spoke for India. Writing and producing knowledge at a time when Indian Art was establishing itself his writings can serve as an important document to illuminate the field itself. His writings had several intentions like, refuting the judgements proposed by many Western scholars who wrote blindly about Indian Art, grounding an aesthetic critique of capitalism and industrialisation - exalting the village system, craft economy and artisan as the architypal artist, opposing the West to the East and arguing for a cooperation of West and East, etc. His writings were never strictly confined to art history but I would argue that Indian art was a ground to construct and to give truth content to a

number of still now debatable and controversial propositions.

To be sure, Coomaraswami had considerable insight to the modalities of colonial discourse itself. A little paragraph that he wrote about Rudyard Kipling would attest to this fact, but along with that other issues also makes itself visible. About Kipling, he wrote:-

"The English speaking peoples have indeed laboured under one great handicap, that of their domination by Rudyard Kipling, a skilled performer in the gallery to be sure, but one whose irresponsible and uninstructed mentality represented all that an Englishman ought never to have been.....you English speaking peoples likened to him nevertheless and gave him a place in your literary pantheon where in fact he held up the mirror of the adolescent imperialist mentality and carries it and his "white man's burden" so bravely. How can we think of you as grown up men as long as you play only with such toys as Kipling gave you and only babble of green fields - the playing fields of Eton? It is high time that the Hollywood picture of India was forgotten."[51].

Here while the colonial narrative of Kipling is

subjected to criticism, Coomaraswami's own position is rooted well within the colonial matrix. For he is speaking for Indians ("How can we think of you as grown up men....") but the whole arguement is based on the opinion about the virtue and honesty (Englishness) of the English speaking people ("irresponsible and uninstructed mentality - represented all that an English man ought never to have been"). That is the English man, by nature is not susceptible to corrupt thinking and prejudices ("irresponsible, uninstructed"), only some of their writers had corrupted them. (This notion of the innate Enlightenedness (Englishness) of the English men and English rule is one of the recurrent themes throughout modern Indian history. Dadabhai Navoroji, the first Indian to be seated in English Parliament, wrote a book titled as "poverty and the unBritish rule in India".[52] Later on in a complete set of writings, Gandhi also evokes this same metaphor.)

Even though Coomaraswami is vocal in his claims and praises for the oriental civilization as opposed to a materialist modern West, underlying all there is his particular loyalty to England. And in some places he puts it directly.

"The inspiration of our nationality must not be hatred

or self-seeking, but love first of India, and secondly of England and of the World. The highest ideal of nationality is service: and it is impossible for us so long as we are politically and spiritually dominated by any Western civilization, that we are bound to achieve our freedom. It is in this spirit that we must say to English men, that we will achieve this freedom, if they will, with their consent and with their help; but if they will not then without their consent and in spite of their resistance."[53]. (emphasise added) It could be easily seen that this argument was a consensus achieved within the broad spectrum of Indian freedom movement, namely, the landlords, the dominant majority within the bourgeois and the middle class intelligentsia. And it could be argued that modern Indian art historical methodology is born out of this conjecture.

What should be the visibility of this Indian who should chronologically love India, England and the world. "The Indian must see with his own eye. Two things are needful: One that should be saturated with the traditional art of his race in order that he may know to see; the other that he be saturated with the traditional culture of East that he may know what to see."[54]. (emphasise added)

One of his most acclaimed texts and a standard text

book now also for our students studying in Indian art institutions `The Dance of Siva'[55] which is a model form of all his writings is a text where things are more explicit whereas, much of the later day art-historical and critical writings produced in India by various scholars who followed the guidelines of Coomaraswami were due to various reasons forced to conceal (but not to detach themselves from) these propositions[56] In one of the essays titled "What has India contributed to Human Welfare" he wrote "....but it can hardly be denied that the Brahminical caste system is the nearest approach that has yet been made towards a society where there shall be no attempt to realise a competitive quality, but where all interests are regarded as identical. To those who admit the variety of age in human souls, this must appear to be the only true communism."[57] Or, "Hindus grasped more firmly than others the fundamental meaning and purpose of life and more deliberately than others organised society with a view to the attainment of the fruit of life; and this Organisation was designed not for the advantage of a single class but to use a modern formula, to take from each according to his capacity and to give each according to his needs."[58] and at another time, for his worship of the caste systems he gave a solution for the removal of untouchability; "The best answer to this problem (i.e. untouchability) was made by Swami Vivekananda. If the

casteless or outcastes want to improve their position, let them learn Sanskrit, which means adopt the higher and older standards of thinking and living, that have only been preserved for millennia because those who practised them would not mix."[59].

Writing about nationalism and `the question of women' in India, a recent historian writes "The Nationalist answer to the question of women was to situate the same to the framework of national culture and tradition."[60]. But another historian investigating about the debate on Sati in colonial India with a slight but significant methodological shift argues that "Tradition was thus not the ground on which the status of women was being contested. Rather the reverse was true: women in fact became the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated, what was at stake was not women, but tradition. Thus it is no wonder that even reading against the grain of a discourse ostensibly about women one learns so little about them. To repeat an earlier formulation, neither subject nor object but ground - such is the status of women in the discourse as such."[61].

Indian Art was for Coomaraswami a ground and an ideological tool to defend all that was Indian in origin, to differentiate India from the rest. It was not the immanent

plastic qualities of Indian Art that was the subject of Coomaraswami but the `Indianness' of Indian art which always remained a vague category throughout his writings. And never from any of his writings on Indian art, his appreciation and judgment of art can be dislodged from his argumentative matrix of the universality and essential validity of the scriptural truth, the notion of an ideal past and his aesthetic critique of capitalism and industrialisation.

Here we have a particular method where the art production and art practices of particular age is not studied with regard to that historical age (which invariably includes the critique of that period itself) but it is studied or even uncritically placed to the forefront only to rationalise and justify (in some moments as an apology) the social practices of that age itself and even worse, for reorganising and preserving it in the present itself. The same thing is true for his arguments about the essential nature of Indian women, the preferred life of the artisans etc., because his selective reading of Indian art and culture and society was conditioned by a radical conservatism and he himself was aware of the path that he had taken.

In his long orthodox discourse `the status of Indian women', he reminds the reader and himself that "In depicting the life of Hindu women on fulfilling a great ideal, I do not mean to indicate the Hindu social formula as a thing to be repeated or reinstituted. This would be as futile as that of the revival of Gothic architecture; the reproduction of a period furniture does not belong to life. A perfection that has been can never be a perfection for us."[62] So Coomaraswami was also for change. But it was the modalities of change that was important for him. Like his solution for untouchability (let all the outcasts be baptised to Sanskrit and sacred Brahmin tradition) would prove, he wanted change and progress but a change and progress that would preserve and reproduce the old (so the true) hierarchies, privileges, and power structures and the change and progress should be under their surveillance. (This aspect is very similar to the anti-modern and anti-industrial rhetoric of the dominant leadership of the Indian freedom movement, which was historically a regulatory ideal for a transition to industrialism itself, but a mask for not taking into account of the specific responsibility and class crystallisation particular to the transition).

One may wonder why a discussion of Indian Art or still

an intellectual production of art history writing of India would turn up into a treatise in defense of caste system, status of women, good and evil of Suttee, an argument against modern civilization, the essential truth of scriptural dogmas - that too without any historical analysis (which are all very important but within the specific discursive site of a materialist history)) in short into a defense of a tradition (not only the so called accumulated values and heritage) but its very institutions. The answer is that Tradition was/is a regulating ideal to control the cultural production and consciousness and to produce truth about Indianness.

Until 1920 there was broadly two distinct art practices promoted and experimented to develop a modern language suited for India.[63]. One is that of the Bengal School where a perceived orientalist practice with a limited enquiry into Western art becoming grounded as a style. And the other method, with the epicenter at Bombay (JJ School of Art) where Western portraits, still life, sentimental and melodramatic courtly Victorian art is coupled with reproduction of Ajanta and Elephantana, producing a ready made colonial art. But within a decade (i.e between 1920 and 1930 (a critical era for the Indian bourgeois and

nationalist movement, with Gandhi emerging as the only authentic Leader and Saint, and Indian National Congress spreading its net all over India), a slow consensus with respect to the cultural programme and art practices emerges between Calcutta and Bombay (with consequence all over India) which were until then literally engaged in a warfare to establish the superiority of their specific methods for improving the modern art situation in India. One recent chronicler of the JJ School of Art writes "The efforts of Solomon (Solomon Gladstone was the Principal of JJ School of Art) made the Bombay School the focal point of the art activities of the nation. Under Solomon's guidance the Bombay School executed in 1923 a prestigious and exciting arrangement known as the "Indian Room" which was to be England's first viewing of "Modern Indian Art:". It was generally recognised and accepted that the true work of the modern Indian Artist is to revive the ancient and national methods of artistic-expression and to revitalate and restore them.".[64] (emphasis added)

Writing in 1981 and looking back to the production of the Calcutta progressive group (1944) a group which was found to enrich the visual language of modern art in India against the revivalist tendencies of their Bengal school brothers Sri Pradosh Dasgupta who takes pride in the fact

that a colonial writer like E.M. Forster admired their work[65], writes "our group was basically tradition-bound although we had a liberal attitude in borrowing from the outside world to enrich ourselves to express in a better and much fuller way."[66] (emphasis added) Not only that we always recognised the six limbs of Indian Art including that of "Sardavisharma" meaning Verisimilitude".[66] It only shows that tradition became by that time such a definite criteria for the Indianness of modern art which itself would give ample insight to the structure and logic of modern art establishment in India.

Commenting upon a recent addition to the historical scholarship on Art movements in early twentieth century, Bengal a contemporary historian writes about the predicament of modern art in India. "The desire to construct an aesthetic form that was modern and national and yet recognisably different from the Western was shown perhaps its most exagerrated shape in the efforts of the early twentieth century of the so-called Bengal School of Art. It was through these efforts that on the one hand an institutional space was created for the modern professional artist in India as distinct from the traditional craftsmen for dissemination through exhibitions and print of the products of art and for the creation of a public schooled in

the new aesthetic norms. Yet this agenda for a modernised aesthetic space was accompanied on the other hand by a fervent ideological programme for an art that was distinctly "Indian" that is different from the "Western". Although the specific style developed by the Bengal School for a new Indian art failed to hold its ground for very long, the fundamental agenda paved by its efforts continues to be perceived to this day, namely, to develop an art that would be modern and at the same time recognisably Indian."[67].

With this proposition in mind, with its problematic accredition of Bengal School, in the next Chapter we would modestly attempt for a comprehension of the Indian Art production in the post-Colonial period.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Geeta Kapur, `Modern Indian Painting - A Synoptic View', Journal of Arts and Ideas, vol.no.16, October-December 1982.
2. See the indirect assertion by Gayatri Spivak that there is nothing outside the discourse of colonialism in Kogndoura Maria, "Naming Gayatri Spivak", Stafford Humanities Review. (Spring 1989) pp.91-93. Also see Anglia McRobbie, "Strategies of Vigilance : An interview with Gayatri Spivak" in Block, 10 (1985):9
3. Karl Marx, Grundrisse (Tr.) Martin Nicolas, New York, Random House, 1973, p.106.
4. Ibid.
5. See W.G. Archer, and Mildred Archer, Indian Painting for the British: 1770-1880, Oxford University Press, London. 1955. Also see Mildred Archer, Company Drawings in India Office Library, London, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1964.
6. Ratnabai Chattopadhyay, Nationalism and Form in Indian Painting : A Study of the Bengal School, Journal of Arts and Ideas vol. no.1, no. (14-15) July-December 1987, p.5.
7. Ibid.

8. Ibid

9. Ibid, p.10.

10. Geeta Kapur, Ravi Varma - Representational Dilemmas of a 19th Century Indian Painter, New Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1989.

11. Jaya Appaswamy, Abanindranath Tagore and the Art of His Times, New Delhi, Lalit Kala Academy, 1968.

12. K.G. Subramanyan, The Living Tradition : Perspectives on Modern Indian Art, Calcutta, Seagull Books, 1987.

13. Geeta Kapur, Vivan Sundaram (ed), Amrita Sher-Gil, Bombay, MARG, 1972.

14. Geeta Kapur, K.G.Subramanyan, New Delhi, Lalit Kala Academy, 1987, p.16.

15. For an Impressionist History of `Calcutta Group' see, Pradosh Dasgupta's Article in Lalit Kala Contemporary, No.37, April 1981.

26. See Geeta Kapur's statement "In virtually one stroke Fransis Newton Souza (b.1924) launches Indian Art into its modernist phase" in Modern Indian Painting - A Synoptic View, Journal of Arts and Ideas, No.16, 1982, p.7. In reading this narrative, one wonders whether it is not the other way around. In one sentence the writer is elevating the artist as a clear break in Modern Indian Art. Then also one question remains -

which is that magic "stroke" and where does it come from?

17. See K.G. Subramanyan, The Living Tradition, op.cit. Also see the review by Ashish Rajadhyaksha of the same book in Journal of Arts and Ideas: Living the Tradition, No.16, January-March 1989.

18. See Tara Chand, History of Freedom Movement in India, 4 volumes. Delhi, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1961.

19. This argument is directly deduced from the agrùmentative matrix of Michel Foucault, especially from the first volume of his History of Sexuality and Interviews with him published in the volume Power/Knowledge. For a detailed discussion see The History of Sexuality, Vol.1: An Introduction, (Tr.) R. Hurely, New York, Pantheon, 1978, and Colin Gordon, (ed), Power/Knowledge, Selected interviews and other Writings 1972-77, New York. Pantheon, 1980, especially the interview with Alessandro Fontana und Pasguale Pasquino titled Truth and Power pp. 109-133.

20. For a detailed discussion of this proposition see Peter Burger, Theory of The Avant-Garde, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, pp. 20-27.

21. "Modern Indian art is an outgrowth of European

colonialism and by the same circumstances, it is hybrid, split at the root", Geeta Kapur, op.cit.

22. A systematic study of Indian Art started only after the end of 19th century. For a brief review of the establishment of such a scholarship, see the first chapter of The Making of a New `Indian' Art; Art, Artists and Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal 1850-1920 by Tapti-Guha-Thakurtha, Cambridge, CUP, 1992.

23. Even a very sensitive historian like Lata Mani writes ".....even the most anti-imperialist amongst us has felt forced to acknowledge the "positive" consequences of colonial rule....". See her article Contentious Traditions; The Debate on SATI in Colonial India, in Cultural Critique (fall 1987). p. 120.

24. See V.C. Joshi, (ed), Ram Mohan Roy and the Process of Modernisation in India, New Delhi, Vikas, 1975, and Partho Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World. A Derivative Discourse?, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1986.

25. Gandharan sculpture was the site for a lasting controversy which ponder, around the hierarchical ordering of Brahmin, Buddhist, Greek cultures in Ancient India. See Buddhist Primitives by Ananda

Coomaraswami in the Dance of Siva, Delhi, Munshiram Manohar Lal Publishers Pvt Ltd., 1974 (Reprint).

26. See James Fergusson, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture. London, 1876, 2nd edition, 1910.

27. See Ronald Inden, Imagining India, Cambridge, Basil Blackwell, 1990, where he is questioning the dominant historical imagination about India and putting up a theory of `Imperial formations' with the support of his research on Rashtrakutas.

28. One of the basic pre-occupation of South Indian historiography is the question of Brahmin migration and settlement.

29. See Henrika Kuklick , The Savage Within The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1991 (93).

30. Ibid, p. 182.

31. James Fergusson, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture, London 1910, p. 408.

32. Ibid. p. 411-412.

33. George Birwood, The Industrial Arts of India, London 1880.

J. Fergusson , op. cit.

J. Benges J. Ferguson , Cave Temples of India, London, 1880.

E.B. Havell, Essays on Indian Art, Industry and Education, Madras, 1910.

------ Indian Architecture., 1913.

Vincent Smith, A History of Fine Arts in India and Ceylon, Oxford, 1911.

James Mill, History of British India, ed, H.H. Wilson, London, 1840.

34. Thomas R. Metcalf, An Imperial Vision, Indian Architecture and British Raj, London, Faber and Faber, 1989, p.10.

35. See. Judith Gautam Mara, Through Indian Eyes: 19th and Early 20th Century Photography from India, New York, Oxford University Press, with International Centre of Photography, 1982.

36. Thomas R. Metcalf, op.cit. p. 211-239.

37. Ibid, pp. 4-5

38. William Hodges, Travels in India During the years 1780, 81, 82, and 83. London 1793.

39. Thomas R. Metcalf, op.cit. p.9.

40. Quotation modified, Quoted by Gauri Viswanathan, The Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India, Faber and Faber, 1990, p. 1.

41. Thomas R. Metcalf, op.cit. p.5.

42. Ibid, p. 5-9

43. Ibid

44. Ibid

45. Tapti Guha Thakurta, op.cit. p. 10-40.

46. See Thomas R. Metcalf's fifth chapter on Arts, Crafts and England, in op.cit, pp. 141-175.

47. Solomon Gladstone W.E. Essays in Mughal Art, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1932, p. 62.

48. Stallabrass, Success and Failure of Peter Fuller, New Left Review, No. 207, September-October 1994.

49. Tapti-Guha Thakurta, op.cit.

50. See K.G. Subramanyan, The Living Tradition, Calcutta, Seagull Press, 1989, especially the chapter on Nandalal Bose.

51. This quotation is from a collection of Coomaraswami's writings selected and published by Durai Raja Singham S., The Wisdom of Ananda Cumaraswami, published by the compiler himself, 1985, pp. 51-52.

52. Dadabhai Navroji, Poverty and UnBritish Rule in India, Bombay, 1873.

53. Durai Raja Singham S. (compi) op.cit. p. 51.

54. Ibid, p. 74.

55. Ananda Cumaraswami, The Dance of Siva, (Indian edition), Delhi, Munshiram Manohar Lal Pub. Pvt.Ltd., 1974.

56. Notice the positive accredition of Cumaraswami by a large number of Indian Art Historians and Critics, especially by K.G. Subramanyan and Geeta Kapur.

57. Cumaraswami, The Dance of Siva, op.cit. p.33.

58. Ibid p.22.

59. Quoted by Moni Benchi , Ananda Cumaraswami: A Study Bharatiya Mancha. Varanasi, 1977, p. 142.

60. Partho Chatterjee, . The Nation and its Fragments. Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories. Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994.

61. Lata Mani, Contentious Tradition, (op.cit) p.155.

62. Cumaraswami, The Dance of Siva, op.cit. p. 123.

63. See the Havell-Gladstone debates.

64. Berburao S. (compiled) The Story of a Hundred Years, The Bombay Art Society 1888-1988, (Souvenir) p. XIX.

65. Pradosh Dasgupta, The Calcutta Group, Lalit Kala Contemporary, No.37, April 1981. p. 10.

66. Ibid, p.12.

67. Partho Chatterjee, op.cit. p.8.

CHAPTER II

THE PRODUCTION OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART

CHAPTER II

The Production of Contemporary Indian Art

The Social Revolution can't draw the poetry from the past, but only from the future. It can't begin with itself before it has stripped itself of all its superstitions concerning the past. Earlier revolutions relied on memories out of world history in order to drug themselves against their own content. In order to find their own content, the revolutions of 19th century have to let the dead bury the dead. Before the expression exceeded the content; now the content exceeds the expression.

Karl Marx.

In this Chapter, in order to facilitate an opening into the opaque terrain of contemporary Indian art, we would start with a critical examination of two short documents/statements produced at historically contingent moments. First, an impressionist mapping of contemporary Indian art[1] at the moment of its celebration by Geeta Kapur, the leading promoter, critic and historian of the same, in connection with the festival of India (1982), England, one of the biggest propaganda exercise by the independent Indian state at the time of the second reign of Mrs. Gandhi, the `success' of which the curator reported back as, "and in addition to the two quite spectacular inaugural receptions

(with the Earl of Harewood and Sir Hugh Cassan as Guests of Honour) to which four to five hundred people came, a chain of social gatherings was arranged during the course of the exhibition. To this English artists, art critics and historians were selectively invited to meet with the Indian critics artists present".[2]

The catalogue briefly mentions the usual questions of authenticity, Indianness, Tradition and Modernity and locates independence as the moment of crucial importance. "Curiously modern Indian art picks up momentum at the very moment of our Independence in 1947; political and cultural emancipation (emphasis added) do not always coincide like this"[3]. Now there is no attempt to illustrate the nature and content of this `emancipation'. But one of the opening remarks of this same document is: "Having inducted Indian society into the historical process of modernisation, the West still tends to deny us the consciousness of it."[4] If at all we forget for a moment the actual historical and institutional site (The Royal College of Art, England - which has a highly charged historical position of an agency with regard to modern Indian art - even now a considerable number of contemporary Indian artists had their education in that very institution) where this remark is made, a momentary glance through this very catalogue, where the biographical sketches of the participating artists are printed, would starkly reveal that all of these artists are

known to West and vice versa; most of them had their recognising exhibitions in world's leading centres of art market, many had been `artists-in-residence' in major Western academies etc. Having completely ignored the complexities of our modernity in one sweeping sentence and reversely crediting the `West', the status of a historical and sociological agency (not invoking categories like mode of production, exploitation and conquest) for the modernisation of India, what the author seems to drive home is a lamentation that the West even though recognizes the physicality of our modernity is nevertheless reluctant to attest a stamp of authenticity to it at the level of our actual lived experience. To be sure, the voice that we hear is not the voice of revenge or that of historical wisdom. The irony is that it is not the `West' that is reluctant to attest authenticity to our modernity but the actuality of our own history itself. To argue in another way, what is absent is the historical wisdom and political courage to stand on our own, if needed, to negate the stamp of authenticity that is reluctantly sought by modern Indian art from Western mechanisations of selective canonization. To defend herself from the sort of questions arising out of the complexity of the reality of the world, she continues; "usually when the issue (i.e. Indian modernity) is discussed, it is completely sociologised and the pros and cons of modernisation are thrashed out empirically, in the

matter of culture and the arts we are faced with these over-arching, somewhat metaphysically posed, questions: how can Indian appropriate Western modernism without misunderstanding and reducing it?"[5]. The trouble is, it seems, it is not sociology that is the culprit, but her own notions of 'Western' and 'modern' (borrowed from a quasi-mystical anthropology) whereas from the premises of a materialist historiography even though the modern has its germinal moment in the geographical site of Europe, it is completely an autonomous experience of life related to the concrete history of the changing mode of production, social ordering, civil society etc and its materiality is not the invention of a mystical entity known as the `West'. (A historically contingent West, of course, does exist; but it has to be investigated from altogether different premises).

Long back in 1946 (a time which she refers as the coinciding of political and cultural emancipation of India) a rare historian of India, D.D. Kosambi, reviewing the `Discovery of India' by Jawaharlal Nehru, who literally personifies the emancipated India (rational, scientific spirit, modern, respect for tradition and all that goes in that flow) had remarked that the Indian bourgeois is coming of age.[6] It is worth noting that modern art, one of the most exalted possessions of that class fifty years after its `emancipation' is still speaking in the voice of complaint, self-defence, protection and apology.

Even though she registers the existence of a particular stream of scholarship that is critical of the 19th century construction of Indian Tradition as a monolith, she invariably places the problematic of modern Indian art and artists within that tradition itself." What appears to be a mess from the point of view of the West is for self-reflecting Indians the problematic, the first element of which is invariably the Tradition. Now when it is asked, how can the Indian artist be truly modern, it is from the premise that Indian tradition discourages individualism. And this is the very core of modern consciousness. It is true that Indian metaphysics as also aesthetics enjoins the artist (the ascetic and house holder alike) to undo the Ego, to accomplish what Ananda Coomaraswami calls "self-naughting" and only in that disinterested state one's creative energies are realized. It is also true in social practice the temple artisans as well as the village craftsmen worked anonymously, claiming no unique vision which is not, so to speak, the gift of the primordial craftsman, Viswakarma. From the amazing continuity of artisanal creativity - from not only the medieval but ancient to the present times - that self image of the Indian artist must differ from that of his counterpart (consider the archetypes for the Western artist, Deadalus and Lucifer and the difference will become startlingly clear). The urge to pitch himself into what is seen as a hostile world is not

perhaps a part of the spiritual volition of the Indian artist."[7]

Here, while postulating the possible landscape of the subjectivity of the modern artist in India, the author is commuting between an attributed metaphysical genealogy of the East and West which is perceived to be at sharp opposition - where the Traditional Indian Archetypal artist is the `anonymous artisan' and that of the West is Deadalus and Lucifer and a Jungian psychology which is in constant search for Archetypes to render meaning to contemporary history. It may be intentional that a crucial question, even for a more complex understanding of the `Indian Tradition' itself, that why the "anonymous artisan" remained anonymous in that Tradition, whether it is only because of his `metaphysical quest' and positioning or because of historical and ideological repression (which works by mutual exchange) is not at all raised. Or is the `metaphysical' quest for `anonymity' a historical apriori or the illustration of the ideological terror of an immensely complex social order? When the complex history of a period is bracketed within the boundaries of received conceptual categories like, Tradition, what is really lost is the very grain of history. Tracing the genealogy of modern western artist to Lucifer and Deadalus on one hand and connecting the Ego, Individualism and Modern on the other hand cleverly attributes the `West' as the natural and organic site of the

modern, so that all other cultures in a modern historical situation is permanently indebted to the West for their own contemporary cultural productions. The historical vision that makes this imagination possible is that of a permanent continuity from Lucifer to Francis Bacon, from Old Testament to America, from the Vedas to an artist like K.G.Subramanyan, which in turn erases all ruptures, breaks, transitions in human history and most importantly the radical break introduced to human history by modernity (bourgeois ascendancy) itself, that too with its own complete set of inconsistencies, antagonisms, multiple oppressions and exploitation.

If the pre-history of our species ends with the emergence of the bourgeois[8], then anonymity itself becomes a historical formation. Rather than evading history it attracts more attention from historical scholarship. (The miserable failure of many artists in our own near times to remain anonymous is itself an indicator. And Ego itself is completely a modern formation and unlike what the author seems to postulate, the self and ego are two completely different realities which are not `out there' but are historically contingent and its mutual relationships are themselves historical.[9] "The urge to pitch himself into what is seen as a hostile world is not perhaps part of the spiritual volition of the Indian artist". But a student of modern Indian art may not be purely interested in the

spiritual volition of the artist, but the materiality of the visual production - and its specificity within the trajectory of the material history of Indian society.

And it is not only in Indian philosophy, but in Greek, early Christian, Medieval and Modern Western Philosophy, the Self is an equally important area of enquiry and there is in West also a definitive tradition of experimenting the undoing of the self.[10].

Next to this, she speaks about history: a history where `this Indian artist' who is carrying the dead weight of history as metaphysics - a history where the `Ego' and the `annihilation of Ego' are the only characters - partakes as a "member of a quasi-modern society besieged by opposing ideologies. It is a society based on struggle and the awareness which comes from it: the awareness of history. In the wake of this, self-determination is sought; a reinforcement of the ego at the individual level and at the collective, a formulation of a national identity. The really compelling question is how he can be rightfully modern but whether it is not possible for the contemporary artist to hold a significant pattern, the parameter of anonymity as we defined it - a metaphysical and vocational attitude - with the precipitate demands on his self by ongoing history"[11] (emphasis added). Now defining national identity (nationalism) as the reinforcement of ego at the

collective level, prompts one to raise serious questions about the internal dynamics Indian nationalism and the concrete form it took at different historical situations - from the struggle for independence to its latest forms connecting directly to fascism. Or to put it in other words, whether nationalism itself is a positivity - independent of the forms and languages by which it articulates itself. And by taking recluse to concepts like Ego, anonymity and self as something apriori to historical process ("with precipitate demands on his self by on going history") condemns one to revolve around a `liberal humanist subject' with a saturated autonomy in relation to its own history itself.

Then she systematically places this liberal humanist subject to its real site of emergence: to the positivist academic scholarship which constructs "the social history of India" "in a way that opens up past and presents it as a loose confederation of plural co-existing cultures: high and low, grand and little, with very different and opposing ideologies; these are more or less seen in a state of constant flux and mutual affect"[12] - which owes its own vision to the bourgeois vision of `Indianness' as conceptualized by Gandhi-Nehru-Tagore-Coomaraswami (a definitive tradition with its own inconsistencies), a pluralism, multiplicity, peaceful co-existence, which has its most vocal voice in our own times under the sign of K.G.

Subramanyan's `Living Tradition'.[13]

It is from this broad premises and conceptual categories that she approaches and describes the actual movement within the visual production of modern India. A theoretical perspective which is quasi-mystical and quasi-materialist, which would allow generalised judgements, crossing to the boundaries of populism (for example her remark as vanguardism, "The term which is borrowed from military vocabulary assumes an aggressive conquistador attitude which is by and large alien to Indians. May be even progressivism is alien.."[14] or about the self-image of the Indian artist, "It is better to drink from the source than to end up with froth: To sound the depth one must, as it were, a "diviner" and this role is perhaps particularly suited to Indian artists. In Indian tradition - it is the emotive intuition which is considered the artists most cherished and most developed quality of consciousness".[15] or about history and destiny of India, "In an overwhelmingly poor nation, history should belong to the poorest".[16] or on twentieth century art, "it is true that twentieth century art is basically manneristic: it is eclectic exaggerated, self-consciously stylized"[17]), a methodology directly coming from Nehru, which is mildly criticized by Kosambi in 1946.[18]

Coming to her description of what really happened in modern Indian art: "There were two important artists in

pre-Independence period....I am referring to Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941). Another relevant artist of the period Jamini Roy (1887-1972) had done most of his better works by the end of the decade. But Binod Bihari Mukherjee was working on his great narrative mural in Santiniketan, in 1946-48; and Bombay Progressive Artist Group, the first self conscious modernist in India, formed and exhibited in precisely these years,"[19] Now what is the organic thread that enjoins these artists? "Hussain straddles the transition point. He brings `forward' not only Sher-Gil and Mukherjee but Tagore's introspective dream pictures which had introduced the irresponsible courage that is modernist in spirit and also a naive grasp of the decorative conventions of modern art as understood by Jamini Roy".[20] "M.F. Hussain who belongs to another context, to the Bombay Progressives is also engaged in the portrayal of India. He brings the villager right into the present, rather like a mascot figure: awkward, playful, energetic, his villagers have the quality of great animate puppets meant as though to be carried aloft by the liberal vanguards of India - marching in the Nehru tradition".[21] Here things are clear. The selective genealogy that she traces for contemporary Indian art from Tagore, Sher-Gil, Jamini Roy, Binod Bihari, culminates in Hussain whose images are marching in the Nehru tradition, the flagship of the `liberal vanguard' of India. This is the `short history' of

modern Indian art which spans `at the most fifty years'.[22]

The artists she identifies as important pioneers - Tagore, Sher-Gil, Binod Bihari and Jamini Roy - have their own histories which is not very similar. Tagore who took recluse to painting after becoming a `genius' and `sage' in the troubled times of Bengal (School) illustrated a world that was already becoming a romantic curios where he succeeded in a significant level to feel the anguish and the frightening fate of that romantic dream itself through the selective use of colour and a consciously `naive' style from which he never moved out. (There is a Ramkinker's Sculpture of Tagore (bust)[23], which is arguably the best critical reading of Tagore ever attempted in India, as a poet, person and even as an era. Ramkinker's Tagore, sliding his shoulders, without a polished texture or the usual grace and coherence, looking desolate and desperate, a Tagore who has finally come into terms with his own real positions and frightened by the same, a self-conscious understanding that he has failed, that he is in the wrong side of history, that his class has become decadent, squeezed out of content, where memories will become remembrances of complicity and shame; but the sculpture never has an element of indignation, where Ramkinker reviews Tagore with cordiality and warmth, acknowledging the attempts that Tagore had undertook, but registering at the same time, a critical distance with the Tagore era, and all that it represented).

Amrita Sher-Gil ("Sher Gil's figures have this slow, deeply languid contour and along with Mukherjee who uses a relaxed but swift line, they give the body a nobility that is particularly oriental".[24] who maintained a critical distance with Bengal School, and an association with Fauvists and later times with Ajanta, transcribed a liberal bourgeois awareness but always reducing her "subjects" into the level of still life. True she maintained signs of a rudimentary feminist consciousness but never affirmed it on the level of solidarity or comradeship but kept it at the level of intellectual sympathy.

Jamini Roy who viewed modern art only at the level of style, condemned himself to the same where only craft and wit counted. He painted within the safe boundaries of folk and popular and a constant fear of being got corrupted by the world, produced icons to be embraced by a large majority of succeeding Indian artists.

Binod Bihari Mukherjee also has a very problematic relation to the early idols of the Bengal School, but stands firmly rooted within a figurative-narrative tradition; had a deep understanding of the Bengal landscape receptive to the world and affirming its positivity within the pictorial conventions of an elastic visual language where he consciously avoided any real confrontation but submitting

himself to a liberal vision of pluralism and coexistence.

But how "Hussain becomes a transition point"? As she never answers this - what we can attempt is to pick up her own narrative about Hussain from `Contemporary Indian Artist' and to see it in critical light. But even to get into the intricacy of that narrative, a note on her methodology is required. "My intention has been to work out a pattern of relationships between the life, ideas and work of an artist, to construct a set of living pictures, so to speak".[25] "Each chapter opens with a biographical introduction, a selective personal history of the artist's life"[26]. "More importantly the biographical selections have served as a basis for perceiving the complex demands of the artists' vocations..."[27]. "The work of art is a compound of the most unexpected elements; that is in the words of Arnold Hauser, "the nodal point of several different casual lines: psychological, sociological and stylistic"[28]. That is this is a "descriptive analysis"[29] where biography, psychology, sociology and stylistics interweave each other.

"The prevailing topic of his art has been peasants and tribals and their Gods, of myths and legends who still hover among villagers"[30]

"The rural Indians gave him the benefit of his roots and at the same time the full resource of rich mythology. In the following years, the image of the peasant became for him both a secure reality and a cultural symbol".[31]

"From one city in India to another over the years to Geneva, Milan, Paris, London and New York, Hussain cuts across classes, cultures and continents with the apparent ease of the jet-set and the style of a star."[32]

"Taking Picasso as the starting point, one is tempted to place Hussain in the broad streams of Expressionism. However, Hussain's expressionism derives more from environment in which he started serious painting than from his temperament or conviction."[33]

"He has allowed himself to be annexed by the bourgeois world, realizing that it alone has the power to confer money, glamor, and fanfare".[34]

"But now if one day he paints the peasant, the next day he paints his oppressor with the same alacrity and bonhomie"[35]

"He piles together the contradictions and then shuffles the pack."[36]

"It is true that his primary concern is not with the historical state of man and that his peasants - therefore are not strictly a class with specific social attributes or historical role."[37]

"Indeed Hussain is one artist who has something of the same appeal as a film star in India".[38]

"Hussain had laid his tracks long before he became popular. The cultural sociology of post-1947 India, it happened, was on Hussain's side. In the flush of independence, the intelligentsia concerned with matters of culture was

naturally keen to discover and promote indigenous artists - writers, dramatists, film makers. However, indigenism had to be in tune with an internationalism to which we could lay claim more confidently now that we were independent. The content of Hussain's art which mostly comprised traditional, mythological and folk themes, made an immediate appeal, even as his vigorously executed Expressionist idiom carried all the flavour of modernism".[39] "Hussain's art seemed to be what every one was waiting for at a particular moment of time in the "progress" of Indian culture."[40]

"At best Hussain has given the Indian villager his mythic dimensions"[41]

"Those hundreds of haphazard paintings which are so popular have served in time to camouflage the mighty spectacle of India. In a way that have served as too well perhaps, because the reality would stir our depths out of shape."[42]

"His is not an organized or systematic sort of radicalism".[43]

"There is a certain truth in Hussain's understanding of class categories and the degrees of individualism they permit. But it is something of an oversimplified truth".[44]

"For all that, it is difficult to deny that Hussain has just skimmed Hindu mythology for the purpose of extracting a quick image whereas it ought to have been so churned that the Gods and demons might be thrown in new shapes and relationships."[45]

"That he can't when he deals with the tradition bound Indian, locate his individuality (or does not think it necessary to do so) makes his conception of the `type' somewhat restricted and superficial."[46]

"On the whole, Hussain's work displays both the positive and negative aspects of the aesthetics of a ritual".[47]

"Hussain's pictorial language is eclectic. Although eclecticism is a part of the cultural ambience of the twentieth century and almost inevitable in countries of the third world, where traditional cultures have been scuttled by foreign influences, Hussain is an eclectic by temperament."[48]

"He rejected Jamini Roy because he was emulating Bengal folk art rather than transforming it to his own contemporary purpose."[49]

Finally, where is the author proceeding? Hussain is a film star, he is decisively with the bourgeois for its fanfare, his subject is villager, he is expressionist with a difference. He is influenced by Indian temple sculptors[50], all the miniature schools[51], by performing dances[52], his villagers have mythic dimensions, he is influenced by Jamini Roy[53] but he rejected Jamini Roy, the secret behind his success is connected to the needs of the independent state (in another context, she had remarked that Hussain had become the "official draftsman of the State"[54).

Coming back to her own document on modern Indian art,

"In Indian art of 1950's, the issues at stake were identity and survival. In painting terms the artists were testing their sensitivity and devising an individual style. And the two sets of concerns were seen symmetrically related. As for the international scene, this was the time of extreme ideological polarities - the cold war. And the `free world' identified with the cause of spirit and abstraction in art. Now when the current French influence mutated with the Indian temperament a curious thing - happened. We developed a quiet almost quiescent, aesthetic. The self-projecting-figure was withdrawn from the work of some of the major Indian artists and what was left on record were the nearest signs of the human presence in nature"[55] Now the question is where does this "quiet and quiescent aesthetic" stand? And who were these artists? And what was their production? As Geeta Kapur herself mentions, along with the Indian art, the `International scene', `cold war', and certain other questions should also be raised. Where did the Indian state stand at that time? And what was our concrete history? These are compelling questions which demand detailed historical description and treatment. But for the clarity of our argument, this much should be said: The Indian bourgeois was trying with double edge to consolidate their economic and political power aiming at a negotiated consensus with the feudal landlords. At the same time the Indian state was trying to carve a limited space in

international scene with its own policy of non-alignment (which would squarely fall within the ideology of `third worldism', the official voice of the newly independent Afro-Asian-American ruling class, which never spoke in the name of class or history but nationalism) which would bargain and commute with the "Two worlds" and our material history was animated with continued oppression, the saga of political prisoners, Landlordism, caste war, blood-stained communal madness....and on the other end not to speak of the official censoring mechanisms. An era which is now sarcastically referred back as `Nehruvian socialism'. It was at this background that a `quiet and quiescent aesthetic' concerning itself with questions of European formalism and geometric abstractions made its appearance. "This happened in 1960's. The abstract painters are significant because they set the scale for the painterly skill in India. The pervasive sentiment in the work was lyric, tender, elegant - I am referring here to the works of V.S. Gaitonde, Krishna Reddy, Arpita Singh. It was also in its way self-possessed. This painting laid the basis, moreover for a geometrical abstraction such as in the works of Nasreen Mohammedi and thereby established a rigour of means" (emphasis added).[56]

"With artists like Swaminathan, the desire to introduce anarchy into the Indian scene was quite conscious. Breaking the professional discipline which the older painters had in

their way quite admirably established, he proposed to regroup the forces on a principle more conducive in his eyes to the Indian genius, evoking the magical potency of the folk and tribal cultures which are still alive and contemporary, he questioned the technocratic, incipiently authoritarian culture of the West".[57] (emphasis added). One might wonder in what sense Swaminathan introduced anarchy into the art scene. At the level of painting-language? (Even at a superficial level his pictures had a completely finished surface!) And if anarchy is in relation to the "professional discipline" which the `older artists admirably established' then what was that much professed "professional discipline"? Say the life and work of an artist like Nandalal Bose or Hussain? And if he openly registered his uneasiness with the mainstream Indian art of his times (which with his own consent absolved him also) would it amount to the "introduction of anarchy"? To say about his regrouping of Indian art on principles of "folk and tribal" in opposition to "technocratic, authoritarian culture of West" is an old discourse deeply embedded within colonial discourse and at another level is a complete misconception of a particular stream of modern art as `new primitivism and tribalism" whereas the real issues it addresses is completely of another order.

Now coming to K.C.S. Panicker, "with K.C.S. Panicker, the occult element was marginal, the motifs were freely,

humorously mixed with quasi-religious, even hocus-pocus symbols scribbled like graffiti in India"[58] Here she is speaking about a selective K.C.S.Panicker (who became the edifice of what is now known as Madras School with its culturally decadent brand of indigenism and internationalism). But what about the narrative figurative paintings which he painted in 1940s and 1950's : Say a painting like the Malabar Peasants which would be a singular work in modern Indian art where literally a whole Malabar village, its flora and fauna, Gods and all sorts of activities related to rural life, is depicted with an aura of festivity, celebration and happiness, a pictorial representation that achieves an optimum integrity - with respect to the idealist vision about village.

Looking through a group of different artists, Manjeeth Bawa, Meera Mukherjee, Nagji Patel, Himmant Shah, Mrinalini Mukherjee and Jairam Patel, she concludes that "Sexual imagery abounds in Indian art"[59] Now where does this sexuality concretely related to Modern India, which inherits many of its moral codes from a late Victorian culture. It seems that we could correct it with a general observation by a historian of sexuality. "Nineteenth Century - and it is doubtless with us - was a society of blatant and fragmented perversion. And this was not by way of hypocrisy, for nothing was more manifest and more prolix or more manifestedly taken over by institutions and cultures".[60]

Along with this we have to remember that much of our own contemporary art production can be directly related and connected on formal levels to late 19th century, early 20th century European modern art.

Passing to what she remarks on the second phase of figuration in modern Indian art, which includes some leading Indian mainstream artists with whom she identifies[61] "The earlier artists had chosen to adopt personae; in the second phase of figuration the specific physiognomy of the Indian type is slowly revealed[62] (emphasis added). To speak about Indian type means speaking from the realm of anthropology, nationalism and a discourse on body.

"We can speak then of a generalized inclusive archive, a shadow archive that encompasses an entire social terrain, while positioning individuals, territorialized archives; archives whose semantic-interdependence is normally obscured by the "coherence" and "mutual exclusivity" of the social groups registered within each. The general all inclusive archive necessarily contains both traces of visible bodies of heroes, leaders, moral exemplars, celebrities and those of the poor, the diseased, the insane, the criminal, the non-white, the female and all of the other embodiments of the unworthy. The clear-cut indications of the essential unity of this archive of images of the body lies in the fact that by mid-nineteenth century a single hermeneutic

paradigms had gained wide spreaded prestige. This paradigms had two tightly entwined branches, physiognomy and phrenology. Both shared the belief that the surface of the body, and especially the face and head, bore the outward signs of the inner character."[63]

And another critic says that this new physiognomy has its "more proper location in nineteenth century body archive created to locate individuals in the new urban mass with its new series of crime and disease. Here the image is particularized within a series. But the series is searched in order to keep apart the social classes whose purity lines are violated by crime and disease".[64] (emphasis added). If we read this along with an observation by the late sculptor K.P. Krishna Kumar about one of the painters, Gulam Sheikh, one of the new figurative artists: "Like in a tableau, people, houses, lanes, skies, birds, birth, death and masturbation are delineated one by one in the painting of Gulam Sheikh. In the struggle for getting the entire universe in to canvass, he resolves it visually into something inconceivable and transcendental."[65] We must also keep in mind that 1970s is a time when Indian urban spaces are getting crowded and state terror became intensified.

Her history of modern Indian art ends with K.G. Subramanyan, who "contains the edifice"[66] of contemporary Indian art. "We come full circle. This brief history

started with the theme of the village - and there is the unique proposition by K.G. Subramanyan awaiting us....transposes the modernist, predilection for formalist play upon the virtuosity of traditional technique and raises both to the plane of sophisticated comment with his malicious, erotic, ebullient images he introduces almost for the first time in modern Indian art a dazzling wit"[67] In short what the author says is that the village (peasant) is the only one enduring theme of modern Indian art and its pattern of movement is circular. Surely our question would be why the visibility of the mainstream modern Indian art never crossed the boundaries of "village"?

As a concluding critique of her brief history of modern Indian art, some other questions have to be raised. In tracing the development of modern Indian art, why an enduring sculptor and painter, namely, Ramkinker Baij was not even mentioned? The one possible answer may be that he was an artist who worked outside the regulatory ideals of Tradition and Modernity, free and not afraid to use the rich repertoire of ancient Indian stone sculptures and modern art (especially his sculptures owe their volume, depth and palpability, the rich glow of life and animated passion to his deep understanding and careful experiments with the visual vocabulary of Ancient Indian stone sculptures along with the experimental urge that he got from modern art) within the matrix of his actual lived experience, passions

and rudimentary historical knowledge. Her characterisation of Swaminathan as anarchy, of projecting Ramkinker as a "punch drunk Baud",[68] of ignoring the narrative-figurative period of K.C.S. Panicker - a device of exclusion and appropriation - cleverly produces a history of modern Indian art which is easy to handle, describe and decorate it with quotations and anecdotes - a method which Subramanyan calls "ecelecticism"-[69]. But what we have to investigate is whether it is this method that makes this history possible or whether it is the internal structural modalities of modern Indian art that invents or necessitates this method to legitimize its production as the real history. For that we would briefly look into another document produced by another critic.

II

The second statement is produced at times of anguish and trouble, ("These books arrive before us at a time when we do not feel confident of our inheritance")[70] times when there were signs of protest, consolidation and solidarity within the field. It is also another statement, by another critic, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, a review article published in the Journal of Arts and Ideas (No.16) reviewing a monograph K.G. Subramanyan by Geeta Kapur, and a collection of articles by K.G. Subramanyan, titled, The Living Tradition : Perspectives on Modern Indian Art. The main concern of the

review article is a self-perceived threat to the largely conservative art establishment in India by a small group of artists who held an exhibition titled `Questions and Dialogues' in the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, in 1987.[71] and to read back the anxieties it produced on the author in a psychoanalytic language directly borrowed from Lacan. To quote the author directly "A brief not on my use of psychoanalytic references: I am very close to both the voices represented here and I cannot but feel personally involved - feel included, responsible, threatened, guilty; such proximity is for me part of our condition today where many of the problems we are facing are our's which have not been imported, which do not lie `out there'. As a colleague recently pointed out, whereas so much of earlier mass-communications came in with the culture of `better things' of late it is increasingly concentrated on a purging of guilt and responsibility for what is around us. Given the responsibilities we have to admit to it becomes particularly difficult to state our dependence on anything, which is why we sometimes settle for reactive `language systems. I can only hope that these references in their use, will finally fit into a possible tradition for us. This reference is to Melanie Klein : `When the objects are reintrojected they become the ideal and persecutory roots of the super-ego. In the depressive position objects are persons: mother, father and eventually the parental couple.

They are seen as whole objects, both in the sense of being persons and in the sense of not being split into totally good and totally bad figures. The relation of the object is ambivalent, and when it is introjected, it becomes the depressive super ego. This super ego is a loved object and attacks on it gives rise to a sense of guilt. Hanna Segal, Klein, Fontana/Collins, 1979, p.124"[72] (emphasis added).
and "Subramanyan's is a voice from the distance....it is a voice whose well springs I can only understand in psychoanalytic terms, the voice of a father figure whose reassurances I simply do not believe, which indeed, terrify me".[73] (emphasis added).

Even though the apparent position he takes is that of a both `insider' and `outsider' (neutral "free" objective intellectual) with respect to mainstream Indian art practice, a close reading of the above quoted `confession' would prove beyond contestation that his real position is that of an `insider'. In simple terms what the author says is that for him Subramanyan and Geeta Kapur are `symbolic' father and mother of contemporary modern art ("who do you love more, Daddy or Mummy?")[74] The increasing proliferation of mass-communications is pushing him to an `existential crisis' so that he feels to be a party in and responsible for these same events and its effects happening around his world. Because of the particularities of his historical situation and responsibilities, he has (as an intellectual);

it is impossible to be clear or acknowledge where he really stands, ("it becomes particularly difficult to state our dependence".) impossible to criticise, or even to stand alone. So the only possibility is to "settle for reactive `language-systems'"... To be more direct, unable to face history - due to the particularity of that history itself - he is taking recluse to linguistics." when it (object) is introjected it becomes superego. This superego is a loved object and attack on it gives rise to a sense of guilt"). i.e. the author loves Subramanyan ("veteran controversial artist, craftsman, art-educationist and writer, possibly the single embodiment of those notions of valid orthodox art practices that are today under the greatest threat, once again squarely at cross-hairs of a debate on Indian art....K.G. Subramanyan has.....nurtured two generations of some of India's finest artists. At the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, where he taught for thirty years, it is almost impossible to distinguish, the traditions of that institution from the man")[75] but under conditions of depression he has to be critical of the "loved object" which in turn produces guilt.

Now, as the author himself has said that this narrative is a reactive language-system, we will not enter into the narrative per se, but taking some clues from his own psychoanalytic positioning of the structure of Indian art institution (the father, mother, parentalcouple, ego,

superego, Law, name-of-the-father, speech, language, lack, envy, orthodoxy, Diaspora) we would try to connect it with a little detailed remark of Lacan concerning his own `excommunication from the world psycho-analytical society'. "I am reminding you of all this, I am not indulging in personal reminiscence. I think you will agree that I am having recourse neither to gossip not to any kind of polemic if I point out here what is simply a fact (original emphasis) namely that my teaching - specifically designated as such - has been the object of censure by a body calling itself the Executive Committee of an organisation calling itself the International Psycho-Analytical Association. Such censorship is of no ordinary kind, since what it amounts is in no less than a ban on this teaching - which is to be regarded as null and void as far as many qualifications to the title of psychoanalyst is concerned. And the acceptance of this ban is to be a condition of the international affiliation of the psycho-analytical association to which I belong.

But this it is not at all expressly split out that this affiliation is to be accepted only if a guarantee is given that my teaching may never again be sanctioned by the Association as far as the training of analysts is concerned.

So, what it amounts is something - strongly comparable to what is elsewhere called major excommunication - although there the term is never pronounced without any possibility

of repeal. The later exists only in a religious community (emphasis added) designated by the significant symbolic term synagogue and it was precisely that which Spinoza was condemned to on 27 July 1656 - a singular bi-centenary for it corresponds to that of Freud - Spinoza was made the object of the Kherem, an excommunication that corresponds to major excommunication since he had to wait sometime before becoming the object of the chammata which consists of appending the clause of no return.

Please do not imagine that here - any more than elsewhere - I am indulging in some metaphorical game - that would be too puerile in view of the long and God knows, serious enough terrain we have to cover. I believe - you will be able to judge for yourselves - that not only by virtue of the echoes, it evokes, but by the structure it implies, this fact introduces something, that is essential to our investigation of psychoanalytic praxis.

I am not saying - though it would not be inconceivable - that the psychoanalytic community is a *Church*(emphasis added). Yet the question inevitably does arise - what is it in that community that is so reminiscent of religious practice? Nor would I have stressed this point - though it is sufficiently significant to carry the musty odour of scandal - were it not that like everything I have to say today, it will be useful in what follows.

I do not mean that I am indifferent to what happens to me in such circumstances. Do not imagine that for me - any more, I suppose, than for the intercessor whose precedent I have not hesitated to evoke - this is material for comedy. It is no laughing matter. I should like to let you know enpassant that something of the order of a vast comic dimension in all this has not wholly escaped me. What I am referring to here is not at the level of what I have called excommunication. It has to do with the situation I was in for two years that of knowing that I was - at the hands of precisely those who in relation to me were colleagues or even pupils - the object of what is called a deal."[76]

What we can infer from Rajadyaksha's "voice from inside" is the very structure of modern Indian art, which has almost the character of a `religious community' and `Family' which functions on the principle of "ex-communication", exclusion, and silencing of oppositional voices.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See the Catalogue, Contemporary Indian Art, An Exhibition of the Festival of India, 1982. The Royal Academy of Arts, Burlington House, published by the Indian Advisory Committee, 1982 Festival of India, U.K. sponsored by Hindustan Lever Ltd.

2. Geeta Kapur, Contemporary Indian Art, Marg, Vol.XXXVI No.1, p.48.

3. Geeta Kapur, Catalogue - Contemporary Indian Art, Festival of India, England, 1982, p.5.

4. Ibid, p.3,.

5. Ibid, p.3.

6. D.D. Kosambi, The Bourgeoisie comes of Age in India, in Exasperating Essays, New Delhi, Peoples Publishing House, 1957 (1992) p.10-18.

7. Geeta Kapur, op.cit. p.4.

8 Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Chicago, 1904, p.13.

9. For an engaging discussion on this topic, See Klaus Theweleif, Male Fantasies, Vol.I, Women, Floods, Bodies, History (especially pp.240-270). Cambridge, Polity Press, 1977 (93).

10. Insights to the Western Philosophies engagement with the question of self is illustrated by Michel Foucault in his History of Sexuality, Vol.I, II and III especially in Vol.II and III.

11. Geeta Kapur, op.cit. p.4.

12. Ibid, p.4.

13. See K.G.Subramanyan The Living Tradition; Essays on Modern Indian Art, Calcutta, Seagull Books, 1987 and The Creative Circuit, Calcutta, Seagull Books, 1992.

14. Geeta Kapur, Contemporary Indian Artists, New Delhi, Vikas, 1978, p.x.

15. Ibid, p.X

16. Ibid, p.xi

17. Ibid, pp. 142-143.

18. D.D. Kosambi, op.cit. pp. 10-18

19. Geeta Kapur, op.cit. p.5.

20. Ibid

21. Ibid

22. Ibid

23. The Sculpture is kept in Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi.

24. Ibid

25. Geeta Kapur, op.cit.

26. Ibid, p.xviii

27. Ibid

28. Ibid p.xix

29. Ibid

30. Ibid, p.127.

31. Ibid

32. Ibid,p.122.

33. Ibid,p.137

34. Ibid, p.123

35. Ibid,p.124

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid, p.127.

38. Ibid, p.123.

39. Ibid, pp.123-124

40. Ibid, p.124.

41. Ibid, p.125.

42. Ibid, p.125

43. Ibid, p.137

44. Ibid, p.132.

45. Ibid, p.129

46. Ibid, p.131.

47. Ibid, p.132.

48. Ibid, p.136.

49. Ibid, p.139.

50. Ibid, p.143, p.136

51. Ibid, p.142.

52. Ibid, p.143.

53. Geeta Kapur, Contemporary Indian Art, p.5.

54. See Geeta Kapur, in James Joseph, (ed.), Art and Life in the Last Four Decades, Simla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1989, p.81.

55. Geeta Kapur, Contemporary Indian Art, op.cit.

56. Ibid, p.6

57. Ibid, p.6

58. Ibid, p.7

59. Ibid, p.7

60. Michel Foucalt, History of Sexuality, Vol.1, An Introduction, Harmondsworth, 1978, p.47.

61. See The Catalogue, Place for People, Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay, 1982.

62. Geeta Kapur, op.cit. p.7.

63. Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive", October, 3-9 (1987), p.10.

64. John O'Neill, Two Body Criticisms; A Genealogy of the Post-Modern Anti-Aesthetic, History and Theory, vol.37, 1994, p.71.

65. Quoted by Sivaji Panicker, Anshuman Das Gupta and Preetee Nair in Art, Subjectivity and Ideology : Colonial and Post Independent India, (A Paper presented in the Seminar Modern India : Terms of Discourse, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla (25th to 27th May, 1994).

66. Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Living the Tradition, Journal of Arts and Ideas, No.16, 1988, p.74.

67. Geeta Kapur, op.cit. p.8.

68. This remark is by K.G. Subramanyan, which she approves in, K.G.Subramanyan, Lalith Kala Academy, 1987, p.21.

69. See K.G.Subramanyan Creative Circuit, Calcutta, Seagull Books, 1992.

70. Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Living the Tradition, Journal of Arts and Ideas, No.16, 1988, p.73.

71. "Last Year, a self-consciously radical group of painters and sculptors exhibiting at the Faculty Premises at Baroda organised aggressive polemic that demanded to put on critical agenda issues like post-modernism, questions of sincerity and authenticity of colonial influence and the folk", Rajadyakasha, op. cit, pp.73-74.

72. Ibid, p.86 (Notes and references)

73. Ibid, pp. 74-75

74. Ibid, p.71.

75. Ibid, p.73.

76. Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Principles of Psychoanalysis (Tr.) Alan Sheridan, London, W.W. Norton & Company, 1971 (81), pp. 3-4.

CHAPTER III

INDIAN RADICAL PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS ASSOCIATION : POLITICS, AESTHETICS AND VISUAL PRODUCTION.

CHAPTER III

"Indian Radical Painters' and Sculptors' Association: Politics,Aesthetics and visual production.

> Every age has such peculiar circumstances, such individual conditions that must be interpreted, and can only be interpreted by reference to itself.
>
> Hegel

> Each generation must encounter its history either to transform it or betray it.
>
> Frantz Fanon.

In this chapter we will try to position a group of young artists, who self-consciously organised themselves into a collective (Indian Radical Painters and Sculptors' Association) aiming for what they perceived as the real function and historical responsibility of visual arts/artists with respect to a historically correct and contingent Marxist political and aesthetic practice.

The group assumed its name only in early 1989 at the time of their Calicut Exhibition (Against Retrograde Visual Consciousness; Town Hall, February 20-23) and became non-functional by the end of the same year due to the internal contradictions within the group members, and the moral crisis due to the suicide of the sculptor, K.P. Krishnakumar, the leading force behind the group.*1 Hence, literally the group has a formal history of barely one year. But its formative history has a much more duration and it is in that time the political and aesthetic ideals that resulted in the formation of the group crystalized to a largely visible extent. In the Calicut catalogue they described their own prehistory as:

"It was in 1975. The College of Fine Arts, Trivandrum became functional. But it was only a renovation of the primitive style artisan's school. Besides manufacturing utensils in clay, the college had an art policy to equip students to become drawing teachers in Government schools of Kerala. When it was upgraded to college we expected many fundamental changes. But there was no infrastructure. Neither enough teachers nor studio facilities. It was by sitting in that poor library that we became familiar with the multiple modalities of world art, crowded with Goya, Cezanne and Vangogh. This world was turning our life upside down. Goya through his etchings showed us the brutalities of war. Picasso and Miro from Spain and Orozco, Sequiras and Rivera from Latin America became our familiar teachers. The politically charged lithographs of Daumier and the "Mad Houses" of Hogarth refined our visual consciousness. It was from this that the foundations for our attitude against decadence in art and our resolution for struggle crystallised.

The primary activities of Trivandrum Fine Arts were completely against our surging energy. We organised our struggle for new teachers and infrastructure. These struggles resulted in an intense friendship between us. It was a time when the cultural-political field in India was electrified. A time when Marxist art and literary studies were becoming widespread. The time of Emergency, media censoring and death in Prisons. The constant student

struggles opened up space for searching novel creative forms. In these struggles, what we highlighted was the life and works of the eminent artists of world art. The posters that we created during these periods of struggles were under the sign of Daumier, Goya and Picasso. We were recognizing how they had positively projected their art into the socio-political discourses of their times. Thus a struggle for infrastructure and paint developed itself into the struggle for a new art."*2

Thus the general political understanding and world view of the group comes from the highly charged socio-political milieu of modern Kerala, especially after the vertical split of the Communist Party of India in 1964, the Naxalite movement and its ramifications in student politics and the cultural field. The Naxalite-movement despite its superficial adherence to Chinese Communist Party, the Cultural Revolution and Mao-Tse Tung was internally fragmented from the times of its initiation with mutually conflicting visions, ideals and ideological adherences. The Naxalite movement, at least in Kerala with its thrust on Immediacy and Direct-action, never concentrating on mass movement or trade union and operating under immense state terror, despite its negligible success in getting temporary support bases from certain pockets never rose into the level of a proper revolutionary organisation, but remained in the level of what Marx called the "professional conspirators".*3 Just after Emergency,

the movement was under progressive organisational and ideological deterioration, increasing factionalism, mutual accusations and was under the path of its slow disappearance. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), from the moment of its inception was functioning like a social democratic party, but keeping the organisational structure of the old Soviet Communist Party, completely upholding the party aesthetic ideal, like Socialist Realism, Theory of Reflection etc, politically treading the path of reformism and trade unionism, combining a strange constellation of complicity, parliamentary democracy, nationalist rhetoric and dogmatism which resulted into a minimum programme of survival by limiting itself into an `electoral alternative'.

In the realms of culture and intellectual production also, these very issues persisted. The disorganised searches and experiments for new forms of expression and assertion became highly formalised and deteriorated into the level of <u>style</u> by which preserving the already invented forms and stylistic idioms became priority concerns. Apart from producing a number of "Little magazines"*4 which were destined to have a momentary existence, the cultural and intellectual initiatives by these elements never materialised into something concrete by crossing its own destiny and being critical of itself without any romantic claims and bad faith. It is in this background that a gesture of collective enquiry and organised attempt in

plastic arts (which was almost a non-entity in Kerala) by a group of young artists becomes a decisive moment.

But it is their highly rebellious stand against the visual production under the register of modern Indian art, that they made public at the time of their first group exhibition in 1987 at Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda and their total rejection of post-modernism and whole hearted embracing of European high-modernism ("in this brief critique of the post-modern and apotheosis of the spirit of high modernism, I do not in any way suggest a step backwards. In fact features of the post-modern are definite cultural symptoms of our times on which we stand. Yet, we cannot deny in it a loss of values. Ideologically the formation of our group is related to all these issues I have argued above".*5 (emphasis added).

With "all their passion and sincerity"*6 the group had highly ambivalent and confusing positions with respect to crucial questions like `Art and Society', `Art and Revolution'. `Art and Capitalism', `Art and Nationalism', the specificity and content of Modernism and Post-Modernism', `Art and Humanism', `Marxism and Humanism' etc., - questions which are part of the on-going contemporary debate for which no consensus and historical settlement has arrived even within the Left spectrum.*7 ("A politics of resistance and discovery, a continuous human search for truth and knowledge to enlarge the world and its meanings, struggling for a classless freedom for

every man - as a necessity, and the ultimate freedom from that for a realisation of true humanism"*8 (emphasis added). "In the process, they rejected the most advanced humanistic thought of the time arising out of the philosophy of dialectical materialism but turned instead...."*8 (emphasis added) "post-modernism" is, therefore, the triumph of capitalist aesthetics*9 (emphasis added), "Any art traditions, Indian or Western offers a philosophy of understanding `man' in his surroundings".*10

The statement of the group in 1987 which actually is an indirect attack on the `New Figurative' (the Neo-narrative) art curiously picked up the same academic high art history which would never stress discontinuity but a continuity. "Though the history of art Narration has been a special method which places the `individual' on the `historical' axis, i.e. it directly confronts the `inside', `outside' perception of reality of the artist through his protagonist to face the special temper of his times. However, within the narrative mould also lies the danger of dramatic story telling, of creation of arbitrary situations and facts which deny the political and intend to surpass history. I believe the great Narrative-tradition whether Indian : from the Ajanta murals to the sculptures of Sanchi, Ellora and Mahabalipuram and European from Piero della Franscesca to Michelangelo's Last Judgement to Bruegel to Courbet right upto Beckman and Leger does not fall into a populist rhetoric by compromising individuals

and events and history of their times."

This observation by the group should be understood in response to the highly amorphous character of the essay, "Partisan Views about the Human Figure" by Geeta Kapur, published in connection with the major exhibition of `New Figurative' artists, Jogen Choudhary, Bhupen Khakker, Nalini Malani; Sudhir Patwardhan, Gulam Muhammed Sheikh, and Vivan Sundaram, where she invokes a curious genealogy of human figures in plastic art, starting from Ancient Indian Art (Elephanta, Mahabalipuram, Sanchi....) barely touches some miniatures and then moving straight to canonical western art, with a note which says that "This essay is not about the artists in the exhibition - but it is written expressly for them as a tribute to the imaginative concentration - in their work"*12 (emphasis added).

The complete calling into question, the visual production of the `New Figurative' artists by the group is a bold and positive step in searching for a revolutionary aesthetic where they have to work against the `philosophy of complicity' upheld by the `New Figurative' art/artists which in the words of their most vocal promoter, "Yes, if by radicalism we mean the most advanced view of change along democratic lines for to let the people come back into the pictures and tell their stories must indeed merit the name of radicalism."*13

The judgement of the group about `New Figurative' art was:

The paintings of this narrative movement appear to stand in a critic's court to argue their social and political consciousness, their scholarship and their painterly virtuosity - the events and that characters portrayed are subordinated to principles of structuring and surface design and carry a causal relation to historical process with the use of multiple references and what we have called `textuality', with the use of pseudo-historical content, with the use of narration, with the use of rhetorical tone, a myth is created which says that which is being portrayed is reality and the `historical'. I fail to understand how without severely examining the politics of visual language and subjects (i.e. their particular existence in bourgeoisie aesthetics) how it works, for whom and from whom, to attempt the historical is to `vulgarize' the same. Further, to pledge a pre-occupation with human figure and to be unable to draw and paint it freely and imaginatively with a depth of abstraction and knowledge, certainly speaks for the shrinking sincerity and ability of the artist, one that can be never justified with any theoretical argument."*14

But, paradoxically their own visual productions of the period (1982-87), except that of K.P.Krishnakumar, and to a large extent of their own reading of Indian Art had ambivalent relations with the mainstream*15

pre-occupations; where their subject matter differed from the mainstream*16, the general modality of the language had many stylistic affinities with the very mainstream productions. As a result, most of their productions become statements of fear, innocence, helplessness, mental and moral anxieties, indifference, despair, agony - themes that are within the broad spectrum of a humanist vocabulary which would expressively stand against the `present state of affairs'. In order to place their `subjects' in `history' most of them placed them in their `natural' surroundings/sites. A fisherman with a boat or fish, a Kerala villager within his richly painted landscape of coconut trees and proletarian-lower middle class households, which never became valid statements of the contemporary history/actuality of their subjects or `nation'*17 with all the complexities but became entries to the data bank which can be effectively used to construct an "anthropology of the present."

The group hoped that "By organising radical activities outside the dominant cultural itinerary we believe that we may stand somewhere between mass consciousness and the pure intellectuals, directing in the process both towards a more meaningful and truthful engagement with reality"*18. Here what we encounter is the vision of a small artists group emerging out of the residue of the tragedy and decay of the Naxalite movement with a political aspiration for a positive aesthetic crumbling itself into the very pitfalls

from which it wanted to escape, with all their ambitions of intervention in current historical process, they were already giving up the already existing cultural space to its illegitimate owners.

The group justified themselves with insights from Antonio Gramsci: "Antonio Gramsci in his prison notebook lucidly states our position - "creating a new culture does not only mean one's own individual "original" discoveries, it also and most particularly means the diffusion in a critical form of truth already discovered, their "socialisation": as it were, and even making them the basis of vital action, an element of coordination and intellectual and moral order; for a mass of people to be led to think coherently and in the same coherent fashion, about the real present world, is a "philosophical" event far more important and "original" than the discovery by some philosophical `genius' of a truth which remain the property of small groups of intellectuals".*19

After that they made a declaration of independence of their own group:

"Our group takes character on the decision of our members, not on anything else. In the crisis of our times, we believe that a philosophy of praxis other than one of an isolated petrification of life and art under capitalist competition and exercise of individual ambitions. Our commitment towards a political pedagogy in art, places a

heavy responsibility on us. It is no easy decision only via a politicisation of consciousness and a reaffirmation of true nationalism, perhaps, we can return to our own real past, understand history outside the will of the dominators, with the knowledge of the most advanced global philosophies and sciences. As artists our real task lies in our work, against all forms of kitch, national kitch, international kitch, political kitch, social kitch, social facist kitch, feminist kitch. The jargon of generalisation is overwhelming; sameness mundanity, banality makes us nauseous"*20 (emphasis added).

Writing in 1850s, Karl Marx commented about `professional conspirators' as follows: "The only condition for revolution is for them the adequate organisation of their conspiracy --- occupying themselves with such projects, they have no other aim but the immediate one of overthrowing the existing government, and they profoundly despise the more theoretical enlightenment of the workers on to their class interest. Hence their anger not proletarian but plebian -- "and with profound political insight he registered their positivity also "It is they who erect the first barricades and command them"*21.

If we read the group's own declaration and aims and the language of their denouncement, along with Marx's observations, then we would be able to locate the complex problematic of the short lived collective, without any

sentimentalism. Their ambition to create a new art, their gesture of rebellion against the shallowness of modern Indian art, their anger against the commodification of culture, their deep sympathy for a revolutionary cause, their courage to come out of the shell and to stand naked will be counted as positive gestures. But by their deep distrust for knowledge, reducing the contradictions of art, culture and contemporary society into simple oppositions etc., they condemned themselves to the limited visibility of the present.

But fortunately, some of the group members even after the dissolution of the group, had not completely abandoned the idea of revenge with respect to the mainstream art practices and are working in their own way with a much more deep understanding of the visual form.*22 But here we will discusss only the sculptures of K.P.Krishnakumar.

K.P. Krishnakumar

Forgive us for yourself and for others whom we will kill. The state is not responsible for the destruction of people. When Christ lived and spoke the state did not understood his Aramaic, and it has never understood simple human speech. The Roman soldiers who pierced Christ's hands are no more to blame than the nails. Nevertheless, it is very painful for whom they crucify.*23

Skloskij in a tribute
to Xlebrikov
Quoted by Roman Jackobson

The sculptures and drawings of K.P. Krishnakumar (1958-1989) is the most violent creative attack against mediocrity. In that sense he is not a representative sign of his generation. But a voice that was in sharp conflict with the possible spaces that were available through the numerous choices mediated by the actual permutations and combinations of that historical juncture. And so also was his visibility which is of a radically different order never registering the sentimental family dramas and parochial middle class respectabilities that have filled the countless canvasses of contemporary Indians artists, which his generation earnestly embraced with a saturated amount of cynicism for the outside world.

The uses to which he directed cubism is an exemplary statement of his aesthetics. For him cubism was only a method and he never hesitated to subordinate the method to the material (the human forms).

No possible genealogy of modern Indian art can account for the sculptures of Krishnakumar. He had profound respect and regard for Ramkinker Baij but the language that he was trying to develop was of another order. A sculpture like Boat man (1987, Fiber, work destroyed) or Revolution and Flowers (1989, mixed media, possession; artists mother) would give rudimentary ideas of that dynamic sculptural authority. For him it was no longer a question of adding some sort of imaginary supplement to what the eye

discovers; but also insisting on the qualities of the surface itself which is there to be known. But the sculpted object is not a mere support for surface transformations by which the object is transformed to the domain of fantasy.

A careful look at the portraits Krishnakumar had done, that of Vayalar Ramavarma, the revolutionary poet of Kerala, Ramkinker Baij, artist's own friends and his own self-portraits would testify this statement. Here the object of representation and the object of desire — the real time and the psychological time - are integrated into a dialectical image. May be the only art historical reference one can make from this portraits would be (that too remotely) that of Francis Bacon the exemplary post-war British artist, who tirelessly mutilated the whole figurative principles of Western art with regard to the ideal human figure.

The public sculpture Krishnakumar had done in Goa, (Vasco-da-Gama, 1986) reveals the political trajectory which this artist is claiming with respect to history. The sculpture is created in such a way that the frontal image of the sculpture is visible only if one looks from the sea. (Vasco-da-Gama is looking to the sea). The artist makes explicit reference to the complicity of Christianity to colonialism by asking Vasco-da-Gama to carry a net in his hand. The figure is almost fragile, uneasily reflecting on himself, perhaps counting his fortunes and destiny but

again tempted to look greedily to the external world and contemplating upon the alien lands. Vasco-da-Gama is a curious matrix of greed, ambition, adventure, selfishness and a history that is still confusing, mystifying and terrifically eluding. In that sense Vasco-da-Gama is still now an unsettled history for Indians - he is very much around us.

But the most important component in the whole sculpture is its politically conscious use of space. To see Vasco-da-Gama, one has to step into the sea. Again Vasco-da-Gama is looking greedily to the sea itself. This dialectical engagement, where if one has to understand what was colonialism, one must consciously dissociate oneself from the 'natural' space to a politically conscious historical space, then again Vasco-da-Gama is looking into the sea. But then the Vasco-da-Gama one sees is really different. He is no longer the legendary hero of countless mythical tales that he used to be, but a worn out greedy man with a questionable past. Once stripped of from his mythical aura Gama's biography and history stands naked.

A sculpture like the Boat man (1987, work destroyed) is a singular achievement in modern Indian sculpture without any precedents where two plastic-orders, without which no synthesis is possible meets one another to form a unique image, which can be possessed completely by vision alone. In the sculpture, each of the elements looses its referential connotations to constitute an integrated image

which is deeply disturbing and engaging. The sculpture shares the temporal conditions of this world while surging with an interior necessity. The sculpture like the title indicates is not the actual reality of the boat man but a historical statement by the artist about the working class itself.

"To be a bourgeois does not mean to own capital or squanderer of gold. It means to be the heel of a corpse on the throat of the young. It means a mouth stopped with fat. To be a proletarian does not mean to have a dirty face and work in the factory; it means to be in love with the future, that is going to explode the filth of the cellars - believe me".[24]

Exactly like Majakovskij's proletariat Krishnakumar's Boat man is surging with historical vengeance, ready to explode, to have new beginning.The astonishingly beautiful distortion that the artist was trying to master, acheives an optimum precision and maturity in that sculpture.

But there is another Boat man (Fiber, 1989, possession artist mother) where the boat man has a completely changed persona and history, contemplating on a betrayed destiny, completely suspicious, where the whole volume is self contained. But here also the superior sculptural economy and the combustible volume marks this as a rare sculpture. Curiously these two sculptures are highly personalised

self-portraits of the artist himself.

Another important sculpture that would distinctively stand alone in contemporary art would be Revolution and Flowers. It is almost for the first time that such a concept becomes the subject for a sculpture in India. The sculpture, executed during the Alappat Camp (1989) is an unique moment where the ordinary becomes the extraordinary. Executed within the natural background of the village landscape, using seemingly irrelevant materials, (plastic, paper and fibre) with no monumentality and glowing with passion, the sculpture has poetic dimensions.

The sculpture makes direct reference to Tatin's Tower (Monument to the Third International) and at the same time is a homage to the traditional artisans, who built the countless pillars of the temples of this land. (The central component of the sculpture is a pillar-tower. Painted with white, flourescent yellow and red, it projects a structural understanding of metaphor). The sculpture invokes a situation where the dialectical coming together of diverse ordinary and rudimentary objects and beings as a decisive historical event. The complete negation of symmetry in that constructions makes it potentially violent and highly rebellious. As it turned out it became the farewell gesture of the artist. (This is the last work he executed before his suicide.)

Then there is another sculpture The philosopher (1988, Fiber). The philosopher that we encounter through this sculpture is not a professor of the academy, but a younger man who stands naked and introspects himself, his traditions, his history, his knowledge. At any art this philosopher is a sensitive young man and surely born after Marx, ("Philosophers', have hithero only interpreted the world, the need is to change it"), where not only his knowledge but the actual positions he takes with respect to his relative time will acquire double significance.

Even his drawings has its unique sculptural quality where he succeeds to acheive a definite volume and depth without making any recourse to illusionism. In all his drawings, he elevates his objects from its natural order to a historical order, where the organic relations between the drawn images are deliberately broken to create a new understanding which would pierce through the eye of the beholder, that too not by a formal devise but by a directness and urgency.

In most of the artists self-portraits and portraits, there is a passionate urge to negate the present, a deep distrust for an inconsequential existence, an immense desire to be transported to a higher form of life, which is marked through an intertwining of a highly personalised sexuality and a violent courage to face death.

Even when he embraced death with the same passion by

which he lived and worked that act itself was a rich pedagogical gesture. (If you do not understand from my life then you will understand from my death.). In that sense it was an act for making himself visible to a society - that has long back become indifferent. As Roman Jackobson wrote immediately after the tragic suicide of Majakovskij;

"As for the future, it does not belong to us either. In a few decades we shall be cruelly labeled as products of a past millennium. All we had were compelling songs of the future; and suddenly those songs are no longer part of a dynamic of history, but have been transformed into historico-literary facts; when singers have been killed and their songs has been dragged into a museum and pinned to the wall of the past, the generations they represent is even more desolate, orphaned and lost - impoverished in the real sense of the world."[25]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For a detailed history of the group and their activities, See Shivaji K. Panikkar, Indian Radical Painter's and Sculptor's Association: The Crisis of Political Art in Contemporary India. (unpublished paper presented in the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda), 1992.

2. Prathiloma Drishya Bodhathinethire Kalakaranmar Sankhadikkunnu (Artists Organise Against Retrograde Visual Consciousness) catalogue of Calicut exhibition 1989.

3. For an engaging discussion on Marx's Analysis of the Professional Conspirators, See Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire, A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, London, Verso, 1985, pp.11-17.

4. This period from 1960-80 produced some of the most remarkable poets and prose writers in Malayalam. But many of them were outside this circuit. The usual content of the title magazines were poetry, short story, political commentaries and a lot of translations from European, African and Latin American literature.

5. Anita Dube, Questions and Dialogue, catalogue of the same exhibition, Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, 25-29 March, 1987.

6. This is the phrase the group used to designate, the Indian freedom movement and its cultural leaders. See Anita Dube, op.cit.

7. Along with the catalogue's declaration of Marxism as the true humanism, remember Althusser's thesis that `Marxism is not Humanism' or the Foucauldian proposition that `Man is a recent specie' (man being the subject of Humanism).

8. Anita Dube, op.cit.

9. Ibid

10. Ibid

11. Ibid

12. Place for People - Catalogue of Exhibition of Jogen Choudhary etc., Jahangir Art Gallery, Bombay, 1982.

13. Ibid.

14. Anita Dube, op.cit.

15. For example the group's own assessment of Amrita Sher-Gil and Binod Bihari Mukherjee is in complete consensus with that of Geeta Kapur and the `mainstream artist' (And note the comment by Ashish Rajadhayaksha about the `discovery' of Binod Bihari: "I refer to major revaluation of Binod Bihari that took place in the late 1970s when Geeta Kapur herself and other artists of her generation discovered afresh the Medieval Hindu Saints Mural". See Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Living the Tradition Journal of Art and Ideas, No.16, 1988, p.86. (footnote)

16. It was with the Radical Painters group that many `objects' of this part of the world became valid subjects for representation.

17. After all they were the flagholders of `nationalism' ("The search for a person and voice and a search for an authentic history are interlinked. They demand an uncompromising consciousness of `nationhood' through which an artist can speak to big people and at the same time stand in world arena shoulder to shoulder with the community of universal, human and artistic truths"), Anita Dube, op.cit.

18. Anita Dube, op.cit.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid

21. Quoted by Walter Benjamin , op. cit, pp.11-17.

22. For example the works of K.Prabhakaran, T.K.Harindran and Anita Dube would distinctly stand out in their aesthetic and political maturity.

23. Roman Jakobson ; "On a Generation-that Squandered its Poets, in (ed) Krystyner Pomorksher and Stephen Rudy, Verbal Art, Verbal Signs, Verbal Time, Oxford, Basil Blackwell. 1985, p. 113.

24. Ibid, p. 116.

25. Ibid, p. 132.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

Modern Indian art, apart from few exceptions is not an engaging subject. The exceptions are very few - it would come under the signatures of Ramkinker Baij, K.C.S. Paniker, Swaminathan - the latter two has to be wrested out from the highly complex web of their controversial biography and history, which would turn out to be highly negative.

When Goya and Picasso are permanently attached to the stock exchange to speak about a radical art is in many respects misleading. Yet a radical art practice can reveal the disorders within a historic space.

The first political collective in modern art (Indian Radical Painters' Sculptors' Association) apart from having a rebellious and positive intent, in terms of concrete achievements - that of restructuring the art practices in contemporary India - was a self-destined failure. They failed because they never had a minimum theoretical resolution about the problems to which they attached themselves.

It is out of the self-realization that a non-dogmatic political movement cannot claim no other

artist in India, other than Ramkinker, that K.P. Krishnakumar and his friend came out openly against modern Indian art as such.

The short but vibrantly productive and aesthetically astonishing production of K.P. Krishnakumar will be an enduring moment and a constant reference point for a political art in contemporary Indian art. After Ramkinker there is only one sculptor India has produced who will withstand the cruel test of history. But then what is available and documented under his signature can give only a very limited vision of the revolutionary visibility that he was arriving against a hostile world which he loved immensely.

APPENDICES

1. Contemporary Indian Art by Geeta Kapur (Courtesy to Indian Advisory Committee. Festival of India, England, 1982)

2. Living the Tradition by Ashish Rayadhyaksha (courtesy to Journal of Arts and Ideas)

3. Questions and Dialogues by Anita Dube.

Introduction

India is not an important country but perhaps the most important country for the future of the world. Here is a country that merits no one's condescension. All the convergent influences of the world run through this society : Hindu, Moslem, Christian, secular : Stalinist, liberal, Maoist, democratic, socialist, Gandhian. There is not a thought being thought in the West or East which is not active in some Indian mind.

E.P. Thompson, **Writing by Candlelight**

These worlds are placed in an emblematic position at the head of the essay with specific purpose. We can speak to the West only through its dissidents. For in the normal run of things we are still subjected to major ironies. Having inducted Indian society into the historical process of modernisation the West still tends to deny us the consciousness of it. Usually when the issue is discussed it is completely sociologised and the pros and cons of modernisation are threshed out empirically. In the matter of culture and the arts we are faced with these over arching, somewhat metaphysically posed, questions : how can Indians appropriate Western modernism without misunderstanding, and reducing it?

Now, the question of the modern rouses fierce debate in India as well but here is a matter of sifting our choices, of self-determination (and about this there will be more later). In the best moments of the debate a critique of contemporary Indian culture dovetails with a critique of the modern as such, its historical orientation and its implicit values. It is in this scene that E.P. Thompson's message functions : "...There is not a thought

that is being thought in the West or East which is not active in some Indian mind." This is not the evidence of a peculiar genius as of historical circumstances.

This very circumstances, V.S. Naipaul thinks, left Indians *without a single workable idea,* depleted, sluggish. What Naipaul says in terrible rancour should be seriously considered. He is a great writer and there are kinds of truths that are accessible only to the fictional imagination : irony is an acute focusing lens. But in a sense India has been doubled-dealt by irony_historical and fictional_and we should learn to exchange polemics over other people's view of our fate. Naipaul's thesis is drawn from the idea of roots; a romantic idea, and appropriately with the idea of roots comes that of disease, of a withering of the mind and will form a deep-set corruption. The West is attracted to this idea. Disease is a persistent metaphor in self-consideration and consideration of culture in the West. And in relation to India there is added factor: The guilt for having caused a cultural *mess* produces a recoil and possibly the unspoken wish to see the wounded organism dead. However that may be, even if the West is not supercilious it forecloses issues about contemporary Indian culture with alien despair (which is not to say that goodwill and hope would be better substitutes). Perhaps the things to do, it is for us to do it, is to stop the fuss and worry about the roots and to work overground for a bit.

What appears to be a mess from the point of view of

the West is for self-reflecting Indians the *problematic*, the first element of which is inevitably the Tradition .Now when it is asked : how can the Indian artist be truly modern, it is from the premise that the Indian tradition *discourages individualism*. And this is the very core of the modern consciousness. It is true that Indian metaphysics as also aesthetics enjoin the artist (the ascetic and householder alike)to undergo the Ego, to accomplish what Ananda Coomaraswamy calls "self-naughting" and only then, in that disinterested state, are the creative energies realised. It is also true that in that in social practice the temple artisans as well as the village craftsmen worked anonymously, claiming no unique vision which is not , so to speak, the gift of the primordial craftsman, Viswakarma. Given the amazing continuity of artisanal creativity--from not only the medieval but ancient to the present times--the self-image of the Indian artist must certainly differ from that of his Western counterpart. (Consider the archetypes for the Western artist, Deadalus and Lucifer, and the difference will become startlingly clear.) The urge to pitch himself into what is seen as a hostile world is not perhaps a part of the spiritual volition of the Indian artist.

But juxtaposed with this is the fact that the Indian artist is now member of a quasi-modern society besieged by opposing ideologies.It is a society based on struggle, and the awareness which comes from it : the awareness of history. In the wake of this self-determination is sought;

a reinforcement of the ego at the individual level and, at the collective, a formation of national identity. The really compelling question is not how he can be rightfully modern but whether it is possible for the contemporary artist to hold in a significant pattern the parameter of anonymity as we defined it --a metaphysical and vocational attitude--with the precipitate demands on his self by ongoing history.

There is no intention of providing glib answers here. Instead, I should like to suggest that for a self-conscious Indian, looking at the situation from close on, neither tradition nor his historically motivated contemporaneity appear deterministic in the way they must to an outsider. For one thing the tradition is not any more perceived as a monolith though this how it was built up by nineteenth century scholarship, and all though the national struggle--with all his great knowledge of the past, even by Coomarswamy. (It should be added however that while he gave it a sacred and apparently sealed aspect his view of the tradition has a hermeneutic purpose . There is a utopian longing in his writing which , when it is projected, reads like a radical critique of the modern civilization.) The social history of India is now being written in way that opens up the past and presents it as loose confederation of plural co-existing cultures: high and low, great and little, with very different and opposing ideologies. These, moreover, are seen in a state of constant flux and mutual affect. For the artists--poets, painters, sculptors,

performers--this is intuitively comprehended, possibly because the information coincides with their own active, transformative relationship with the concrete elements of the tradition.

Curiously, modern art picks up momentum at the very moment of our Independence in 1947; political and cultural emancipation do not always coincide like this. There were two important artists in the pre-Independence period and both died in 1941 though at very unequal ages. I am referring to Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941). Another relevant of the period, Jamini Roy (1887-1972), had done most of his better work by the end of the decade. But Binode Behari Mukherjee was working on his great narrative mural in Santiniketan in 1946-1948; and the Bombay Progressive Artists' Group, the first self-conscious modernists in India, formed and exhibited in precisely these years.

Which is also to say that the history of modern Indian is just so short, at the most 50 years. During this time however a discernible pattern begins to surface. Sher-Gil and Mukherjee commit themselves to the illustration of life in the village with the understanding that contemporary consciousness needs, first, to develop an image of actual life in India, and this is of course predominantly peasant. (Western viewers who are impatient of the theme of the village should be reminded that in countries where peasant cultures survive, not least American Regionalists.) The two artists I mentioned touched the right emotional tone,

they perceive the allegorical possibilities of their subject devise quite precise modes of presentation. Sher-Gil's figures have this glow, deeply languid contour and along with Mukherjee who uses a relaxed but swift line, they give the body a nobility that is peculiarly oriental.her-Gil makes a transcription of the Indian environment into colour and through colour an evocation of the secluded, sensuous life of Indian women. In his mural based on the lives of the medieval saints (who were, significantly peasants and artisans), Mukherjee works out a rhythmic structure to comprehend the dynamic of Indian life, the unique relationship between routine and spiritual exaltation and between community and *dissent*. A radical consciousness of traditional India is visualised.

M.F. Husain, who belongs in fact to a different context, to the Bombay progressives, is also engaged in the portrayal of India. He brings the villager into the present, rather like a mascot figure : awkward, playful, energetic,his villagers have the quality of great animate puppets meant as though to be carried aloft by the liberal vanguard of India--marching in the Nehru tradition.

Hussain straddles a transition point. He brings forward not only Sher-Gil and Mukherjee but Tagore's introspective dream-pictures which had introduced the irresponsible courage that is modernist in spirit, and also a naive grasp of the decorative conventions of modern art as understood by Jamini Roy. But it is F.N. Souza who takes the plunge. It is probably significant that Souza is a

Christian (Goan, Catholic) but he introduced modernist values with an evangelical passion pronouncing doom on whoever lagged behind. He called the group he founded Progressive, a term already in use with the communists, and fellow travellers with whom Souza had a brief rapport. But the manifesto talked about the values of colour and form rather than in the style of the early twentieth century English critics discovering art for art's sake a little late. By sheer force he fitted together these two ideologies and made them approximate to the current international demands. As for himself, with Picasso as patron saint Souza equipped himself with a self-aggrandizing modernism, walked into the enemy territory of England to test his native genius, and quite succeeded. With him he took, like all good misanthropes, his troupe of malignant characters. His colleagues like Akbar Padamsee and Tyeb Mehta who had been persuaded part of the way along rebellion followed their own more introspective temperaments and discovered the anatomy of pain--existentialist concerns, using the rich painterly method of expressionist vocabulary as modified in Paris.

Everyone left for Paris at the same time--except for Satish Gujral who went to Mexico and brought back a different form of expressionist fervour; and Ram Kumar, who went to Paris but came into contact with French communists and introduced suffering as a *social* concern.

In Indian art of 1950s the issues at stake were identity, and survival. In painterly terms the artists were

testing their sensibility, and devising an individual style. And the two sets of concerns were seen to be symmetrically related. As for the international scene, this was the time of extreme ideological polarities--the Cold War. And the `free world' identified with the cause of the spirit, and of abstraction in art. Now when the current French influence mutated with the Indian temperament a curious thing happened. We developed a quiet, almost quiescent, aesthetic. The major self-projecting figure was withdrawn from the work of some of the major Indian artists and what was left on record were the merest signs of the human presence in nature.

In nostalgia perhaps of the land he had left behind when he settled in Paris, S.H. Raza opted wholeheartedly for rhapsodic, nature-based abstraction. The nostalgia was fierce and the earth was a conflagration of colours. Ram Kumar turned towards the holy city of Benaras which too disappeared, leaving behind stretches of clay, then sand and sky. In his somber, prophetic way, Padamsee turned his attention as if towards the `burning bush'.

This happened in 1960s. The abstract painters are significant because they set the scale for the painterly skills in India. The pervasive sentiment in the work was lyric, tender, elegant--I am referring here to the work of V.S. Gaitonde, Krishna Reddy, Arpita Singh--it was also in its way self-possessed. This painting laid the basis, moreover, for a geometrical purism such as in the work of Nasreen Mohamedi and thereby established a rigour of means.

Around the beginning of the 1960s a new generation of artists was coming up to the scene. While making a place for themselves they were expectedly critical of the proceeding generation who they saw as the Westernisers. Now in all societies that have been colonialised, even at the cultural level like nineteenth century Russia, there is a continual ding-dong battle on the question of indigenism. This is the whetting stone of all ideologies. In India the stand for indigenism had as its political aspect the acceleration of the liberation struggles all over the world and the revival of the issue of identity among artists and intellectuals in the `third world'. It is significant that the first exhibition of the new group was supported by the famous Mexican poet, Octavio Paz.

With artists like Swaminathan the desire to introduce anarchy into the Indian art scene was quite conscious. Breaking the professional discipline which the older painters had in their way was quite admirably established, he proposed to regroup the forces on a principle more conducive in his eyes to the Indian genius: evoking the magical potency of the folk and tribal cultures which are still alive and contemporary, he questioned the technocratic, incipiently authoritarian, culture of the West. (Polemics apart, the Indian tradition does encourage the individual to draw upon the archaic sources of the self; to contain the entropy of the unconscious without repressive self-control. For that matter, Social existence

which is otherwise classified and set within strict hierarchies, places no severe strictures on eccentricity or even insanity, and right into the twentieth century the presence of Holy Fool has been revered.) Not surprisingly, in the matter of creative procedure the alternative principle that was adopted by this group of artists was most nearly surrealist--particularly as it developed under the star of Paul Klee.

But , then this first step into magical imagery, a constellation was set up where the occult, the erotic and the mystical became the shifting transposable circles of an art now self-consciously Indian. This was confirmed by the introduction of a neo-Tantric aesthetic. With K.C.S. Panikar the occult element was marginal, the motifs were freely, humorously mixed with quasi-religious, even hocus-pocus symbols scribbled like graffiti in India. Biren De made pictures of a kind of seed-burst referring somewhat euphemistically to cosmic energy. G.R. Santosh's images are to be seen as a set of explicitly sexual *asanas*.

But if we were to spin back along the concentric circles to the heart of the initial proposition--the *magical image*--many more options in contemporary Indian art can be comprehended. Swaminathan treats images like the numen in nature--that is, metaphorically, but in a sense where the metaphor is now detached from the material--mythical world, and lifted into the ethereal spheres of lyric art and poetry, Manjeet Bawa's playfully pneumatic imagery promises to return the metaphor once

again to the mythic world of bodily transformations. With naive gravity Meera Mukherjee remakes architypal images. The phallic deities of Nagji Patel in marble are complemented by the mock ancestor-heads wrapped in gold leaf that Himmat Shah makes in plaster and clay; one belongs to the temple courtyard, the other to the village shrine. And these are in turn complemented by the towering totem effigies of Mrinalini Mukherjee. Sexual imagery abounds in Indians art: It unfurls through automatic drawings and puts on menacing bat-like wings in Jeram Patel's drawings. For if magical fantasy produces epiphanies it produces fetishist objects as well. And these can invite parody. An artist may adopt the geometry and pun on the occult forms with high technology materials such as steel and glass--like Satish Gujral.

During this period, in India as in most other places, any kind of description in art was ignored, even scorned. This is a distinctly modern attitude: the bogey of illustration . From the early 1970s some of the younger artists break through the mystique, they begin to describe the life around. This work continues,though in another genre, the process of self-determination which Indian artists began in the 1950s. The earlier artists had chosen to adopt personae; in the second phase of figuration the specific physiognomy of the Indian type is slowly revealed.

Jogen Chowdhury evolves an original mode of drawing so that literally the flesh may speak--notice the arrangements of limbs down to the queer curling fingers,

and the sad sweet moronic eyes of his middle class Bengali characters. Once the person is described in terms of his individuality and class the world has stepped in. And Bhupen Khakhar who had been inventing from the tip of his tremulous brush this series of queer, ungainly men arrived in about the mid-seventies at the point where he could tell stories about them--that ancient activity which bridges the commonplace and the fabulous worlds and gives us, the viewers fictional companions that do not so easily leave one in peace. Though this may be hindsight, Khakhar's work, even when it seemed cockeyed and teasing and perversely original,partook of this world view which the *proverb* holds: cunning, humble wise, humane.

At the fabulous end of the story telling art Gulam Sheikh starts up the great ferris wheel of memory where fact and fantasy tumble out. And, in the manner of Indian miniatures which he so admires, he fills up the in and out landscape and the private spaces with these metaphoric images. In the act of remembering the principle of infinite transferability is established, and the unity of the imaginative world is imparted to daily life.

In the strictly urban situation where the artist is born outside traditions and outside memory, so to speak, there are no channels of transmission, and no continuity. Experience presents itself like a puzzle; you fit together the parts according to an abstract ethic and a willed purpose. Narration becomes allegorical. In the second phase of figuration , Krishen Khanna--also A. Ramachandran Bikash

Bhattacharjee--employs the allegorical mode. The comment is social, satirical, quasi-political.

Now as a matter of fact, political art in our times has few options outside the allegorical. Used self-consciously and with the requisite freedom and flexibility it should be able to handle quite complex ideological positions.Allegory allows, for instance, insertion of elements from disparate traditions--quotations--which provide (what Walter Benjamin calls) a "transcendent force" to the contemporary argument. And if one should translate this somewhat abruptly, the transcendent force equals political options. To achieve this, however, the pictorial elements should be worked towards an optimum mutability. Preparing the ground with rapturous colour, Vivan Sundaram builds up an aesthetic to complement the didactic impulse. He matches their fervour, and with that he matches romance and praxis. But towards the possibility of praxis a painter may work more systematically. Taking the working class protagonist Sudhir Patwardhan introduces by look and gesture and grip the possibility of intersubjectivity. Within what is already a refined world, values are posited. This is the basic radical step in the wake of which come questions of motives, ideology, bad faith--and then social transformation.

Now this position splits into two contrary options among Indian artists; into intense subjectivity, and a discrete precise objectivity, except that in both cases the

allegorical encounter is replaced by a `real' one where there is no meaning over and beyond the presence and the mutual affect of the persons portrayed. I am referring to Nalini Malini on the one hand and Gieve Patel on the other. Malini treats intersubjectivity (motives, ideology, bad faith) in the raw which is paradoxically enough as in a dream--analytically revealed. This is story telling as well but in another genre where a series of physiological sequences are [resented. Malini's dream draws out the secret of her woman protagonists which she subjects to moral scrutiny; two presuppositions that really is opaque exception the odd details of an over-structured world, handle the symbols of the dream with a kind of hyperbolic attention.

In Gieve Patel's work the tableau is set in the street and the encounter is so reticently presented as to be incidental; the relationship between the figures is indicated by the measure of distance between them. Yet relationships are posited which are socially sustaining. Like Patel, Laxma Goud places his gentle protagonists in the simplest encounter except here the tenderness is offered unabashed--for the protagonists are the tribal couple.

We come full circle. This brief history started with the theme of the village--and there is a unique proposition by K.G. Subramanyan awaiting us. He has the knowledge of artisan skills behind him when he tells his pantomine stories in terracotta relief. And yet he relieves us of the

tiresome problem of tradition. He transposes the modernist predilection for formalist *Play* upon the virtuosity of traditional technique and raises both to the plane of sophisticated comment. With his malicious, erotic, ebullient images he introduces, almost for the first time in modern Indian art, a dazzling *wit*.

Now a retrospective view telescopes what seemed at the time discreet events into a related sequence. The first set of Indian artists we have considered emphasised the *gesture* in their work; it was a principle attribute of the figures in the pictures rather in the sense of a dramatist who charaterises the figure and sets a seal on it by a master gesture. But the work was gestural also in the painterly sense: it was an autograph mark, a testimony of the artist's vulnerability, and vanity--both devolving upon his existential state. I am suggesting that the gesture was the evidence of a wager in the romantic sense and, formally speaking, the pictures had an emblematic quality, a compressed, simplified, abbreviated syntax and high stylisation. But it is interesting that in the second more indigenous phase, where the motifs are drawn from quite other sources, the image is still treated as a full-formed vision that has simply sprung up by a concentration of imaginative powers--at times an epiphany. In any case the artist offers what can be called *revealed motifs*.

The new figurative art I have spoken about is almost

symmetrically opposite. If a frame is unravelled and the logic of its presentation emphasised the work becomes--that banned word--literary. But then the literary construct is not so different from the historical construct, both are determined by the trajectories of individual and collective motivation. And this is the premise of most recent figuration.

Rene Magritte once spoke about the Morality of the Impossible. This is probably the domain to which one set of Indian artists belong. The second set are concerned with the actual world but where the given is to be radically transfigured into the possible. The degree of imaginative intervention is equally intense.

In conclusion, viewers of contemporary Indian art who are still stuck with the categories of ethnicity and authentically (a revamp of tradition and modernity) or worse, with the assumption regarding all `third world' cultures that they are simply *imitative* , will be able to recognise this: having been thrown into the deep end of history there is now an inner momentum to contemporary Indian art and an unabashed ardour in the practice of it.

Geeta Kapur

LIVING THE TRADITION

Ashish Rajadhyaksha

K.G. Subramanyam, The Living Tradition: Perspectives On Modern Indian Art, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1987, 96 pp. Rs.150
Geeta Kapur, K.G. Subramanyan, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1987, 52 pp. Rs.120.

INTO THE CRITICAL DISTANCE

As I write this, the Journal of Arts and Ideas is gearing up for a seminar: a critique of contemporary culture. It is a response to a steadily worsening political situation, marked over the past two years by some of the most violent power struggles since independence, over what would constitute the ruling norms of culture. An area that has, unfortunately and not always with justification, been the bete noir of the Indian left, looms in the immediate, bristling with an urgency helping to understand it. I anticipate with some trepidation debate on areas that we are simply not used to discussing except in small groups, as we make our vulnerability public.

These books arrive before us a time when we do not feel confident of our inheritance. They are, in many ways, voices from afar. Their coming together is a bit of a coincidence, but it has served to put K.G. Subramanyan, veteran controversial artist, craftsman, art-educationist and writer, possibly the single embodiment of those notions of valid orthodox art-practice that are today under the greatest threat, once again squarely at the cross-hairs of debate on Indian art. This would not be a new experience to the old man: the individual K.G. Subramanyan has, as

much by example as through teaching, nurtured two generations of some of India's finest artists. At the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, where he taught for thirty years, it is almost impossible to distinguish the traditions of that institution from the man.

Although such an elevation of the individual to institutional dimensions has been, traditionally, one of the more useful systems of dissemination and training, it is by no means an unproblematic formulation today. Last year, a self-consciously radical group of painters and sculptors exhibiting on the Faculty premises at Baroda organised an aggressive polemic that demanded to put on the critical agenda issues like post modernism, questions of sincerity and authenticity, of colonial influence and the folk; and the only artist they chose to name and to directly attack was Subramanyan. He contained the edifice.

It does not seem to be quite that edifice that is now being resurrected; despite the reassurances that both books offer, there has been a shift. Subramanyan himself seems willing to let his persona recede before a question that he suggests could contain his life's work: one he encapsulates as the Living Tradition. But is it merely the old container reinforced in new critical terms, or does it hold living promise? Subramanyan demonstrates a rare courage in putting his ideas down, in submitting them to editing and to being reproduced in a glossy paperback; is he risking the distortions of the very excesses of industrial communication against which he seeks a voice? Even his own

earlier writing has restricted itself to exhausting Vishwabharati Quarterly-style pontifications. Does he finally replace the usual we and not-we inclusive-exclusive notions of the Tradition with the real difficulties precisely of living it?

Geeta Kapur forges her approach to these and other questions with care. She eschews confrontation and genuinely delights in her participation: `Talking of play, it so happens that every year for so many years Subramanyan went to a toy-making project' (GK, p.5). She thus adheres to the first law of the guru-father-master moshai figure through which Subramanyam has generated his creative energies: of its elusiveness to all debate other than that of its choice. Accepting this is part of her homage to the veteran, but it also permits her retroactively to lay her own distance from some very tense confrontations. It has been almost mandatory in this century in India that the keeper of the tradition concrete stand-in for the abstract, conflicts with the ego of an adolescent modern, and that the latter bears the guilt of its revolt: to recognize the ideal and persecutory roots of the ego as the object of its search re-introjects upon it.*1 In avoiding this conflict, she is able to render other areas around it problematic: to acknowledge, for example, that the tradition itself is less the problem than our complicated relations with it, to allow a space not just for the historical crunch but also and as much for its emotional traumas.

Working through dependence and regret, our often

frantic search for nourishment and solace, she includes Subramanyan himself and shows how he too has been rent through these divides as indeed he must. Her achievement has to be seen in the way she works it through the one area where we suffer the most acerbic of relations, where the tradition offers its least support: the effort to formalize. At what point are we to imbue our consciousness into so awake an inheritance? To speak of play when just now we feel neither wise nor particularly playful,*2 as we place critical distance before our own home.

THE VOICE WE HEAR

Subramanyan's is a voice from the distance, but its source is elusive. It is trying to tell us something, but more real is what is refusing to acknowledge; something that has happened, a vacuum it is covering up with its calm placidity. It is a voice whose wellsprings I can only understand in psychoanalytic terms, the voice of a father figure whose reassurances I simply do not believe, which, indeed, terrify me.

The ambiguity of the hysterical revelation of the past is due not so much to the vacillation of its content between the imaginary and the real, for it is situated in both. Nor is it because it is made up of lies. The reason is that it presents us with the birth of truth in speech, and thereby brings us up against the reality of what is neither true nor false. At any rate this is the most disquieting aspect of the problem

For it is present speech that bears witness to the

truth of this revelation in present reality, and which grounds it in the name of that reality. Yet, in that reality, only speech bears witness to that portion of the powers of the past that has been thrust aside at each crossroads where the event has made its choice.*3

For the entire Bengal School, of which Subramanyam today is the last great adherent, the Industrial Revolution has been an event that may not be discussed. The one event that gave birth to the modern era is covered by an infantile amnesia*4 to be discussed only as a before and an after. For Subramanyan, all pre-industrial society saw cohesive islands of people in whose hierarchical milieu little changed despite the great conquests. the impact and dissemination of change mediated through `sensibility, skill, concept and language spectra', but seldom in a way as to invalidate and despite the changes wrought over time the skills, like the concepts and sensibility that determined the expression, went on performing those specific functions. These functions were, of course, particular to the community, even to the specific stratum that performed them.

And then, the crossroads: the little islands were destroyed, almost all the skills of the artisan rendered economically redundant. Art expression, he says, was itself rendered superfluous; earlier, being merely an expression of skill, art's functions were as materially valid as any other, whereas now, although it may have risen to `higher utility' it is no longer utilitarian. Except

perhaps to augment `market attractiveness'.

He, Subramanayan, is trying to compensate for the lack - lack of the name-of-the-father-- in `that place which, by the hole it opens up in the signified, sets off the cascades of reshapings of the signifier from which the increasing disaster of the imaginary proceeds.....'*5 He tells us, following his first instinct, that all is well, that `{India} is not fully industrialized and, with the kind of population-resource ratio it has, it will probably never be so. I am not bewailing this as some do. On the other hand, I thank my stars that this is so' (KGS, p.44). Perpetuating the amnesia he says, `....non-professional forms like those practised by women in their households, or ritual acts practised by priests and medicine men, or such professional forms as answer to the needs of the community, practised by craftsmen of various denominations -- potters, metal-smiths, wood-workers, weavers and the like -- who work within an in-social communication nexus, with its limited vocabularies and skill demands, but despite this with a remarkable breadth of sensibility and imager....' (KGS,p.57).

The problem that at its simplest and most nauseating lies in the parent's infantilism, in the question `who do you love more, daddy or mummy?' - or, as the Indian artist constantly has to do, to state his `Indianness' versus his `modernity', his choices between the `present' and the `tradition'-- is one that has to simply be internalized, he tells us. The entire definition of the modern `should be

taken to start with the appearance of the non-traditional artists on the Indian cultural scene' and, it should, he insists, be an ongoing, continuing, definition. And such a definition of the modern, which cannot maintain a continuity of visual fact, cultural attitude and function, which is in fact condemned to discontinuity, should be somehow internalized into art-practice itself. He argues that it is only when we have done so that we shall have resolved, as he has, the problem of the `outsider' to the tradition, of aestheticism--`Formerly an art-object was a magical tool, charm, fetish, ideogram, icon, narrative or parable in its main function; its innate response potential was an accessory, even if a necessary one. Now the latter aspect is primary, the former an accessory' (KGS,p.83)--and of course its alter ego, modernist excess.

And there are mistakes to be explained, aberrations to be glossed over; a Law to be articulated (`It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the symbolic support which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the Law'*7)--and Subramanyan offers himself. He negotiates the entire history of the modern, from a difficult weaning (the question of how to sustain the folk artist through the crisis of the industrial world); to giving its innate sense of adventure and inventiveness full play (the printmakers and <u>patuas</u> of the nineteenth century); to devising a careful education for it (away from the poisonous Puttanas of government art schools teaching academic-style portrait painting) and

keeping it away from mischief (the strange absence of direction or perspective' of the Bombay-based Progressives); to suggesting today that, since we are showing signs of growing up we should not indulge in the juvenile `seasonal eruptions' that we see in Joseph Beuys or Walter de Maria, and should strive instead towards an organic solidity; one that would replace the sporadic `isms' of an art movement with the effort to re-seek the `world view' of `traditional society' in which everything finds its own place. That it is possible is demonstrated, not through any `modern' art practice but through pointing to J. Swaminathan's collection of tribal art in Bhopal which shows that, if not here in our home, somewhere at least things are alive and thriving.

Somewhere down the line the voice gets more and more remote as Subramanyam speculates on our options:

Now, where does all this leave us in the end? At a point where we can be a little more realistic about where East and West can meet and to what extent and how this contact can be useful to either...in the world of today, where cultural factors of one area can knock at the doors of another, it falls to each person to know what they are and explain them to himself as best as he can...if we manage to see them in full truth and perspective we shall have done well; but even if we cannot, as is more likely, it will not profit us the less. For a little sparring

around with unknown or ill-known facts makes us look at ourselves afresh. It makes us blunder on new insights and brings unexpected mutations in our work and attitudes. It also drives us to work out a naive, distant, even impartial vision of these other facts, like the untutored child that saw through the emperor's new clothes. For all their obtuseness to the real meaning of our cultural facts, western scholars have by their scrutiny helped to clear a lot of the mystification and mumbo-jumbo they were swaddled in. This could happen the other way too if we did not threat the west with undue deference. (KGS, pp.73-74).

The stress is evident though the hope is blurring. Naive lips, whose praise will occupy my final days, open yourselves again to hear me. No need to close your eyes. The subject goes well beyond what is experienced subjectively by the individual, exactly as far as the truth he is able to attain, and which perhaps will fall from the lips you have already closed again. Yes, this truth of history is not all contained in his script, and yet the place is marked there by the painful shocks he feels from knowing only his own lines, and not simply there, but also in pages whose disorder gives him little comfort.*8

I don't intend to disagree with that I receive here, I can't. Certainly much of the very interesting theoretical work done on the economic-cultural impact of the industrial Revolution, which he chooses to ignore, does not begin to answer the terrifying questions Subramanyan's voice is raising with its warmth. I am assailed by the sheer vanity

of the norm I perceive: Tangibly a sanctification of things that be, a philosophical benediction bestowed upon despotism, police governments, star chamber proceedings and censorship-- and I berate myself.

I feel very strongly that if the critical tradition does not begin at some point to see all that its investigative problems are evoking, it will only end up with self-flagellation.'*9

It is worth pointing out some of the stresses that modern Indian art has faced, which the voice unintentionally reveals. That the greatest failures of our experience have been in the inability of our living tradition to yield to its own excesses: to the only way it might, precisely, be lived. Like Subramanyan today, Abanindranath and Nandalal Bose in their respective times too sought--sometimes desperately, if you see the contrast of their own art-practice to their theory--to paper the divides over, to emphasize a continuity over all else, when perhaps an acknowledgement of the interruption may have served their own purpose better. Surely this is one of the reasons why Rabindranath Tagore's paintings have caused such unease: e.g. Nandalal Bose's extreme discomfort when he speaks of them, praising them as acts of genius that are unique to him: `I do not by any means claim that the technical style that Rabindranath has developed for himself will give rise to a new school of painting. On the contrary I would like to point out that a number of artists belonging to the Bengal School who have tried to imitate

his style have completely failed. Their failure is not surprising if we bear in mind the fact that what is individual to an artist can never be successfully imitated....'; and elsewhere, `His revolt against tradition is more apparent than real, for he has kept more true to the creative impulse than those who congratulate themselves on their orthodoxy. The popular mind is always scared by the unconventional; it is used to thinking in fixed images....'*10 And also, e.g., Subramanyan's unease with Amrita Sher-Gill: `....sensitive and talented and had a perceptive eye; she soon found to her chagrin that her talent had been hardened by her western academic training...and the results, though they often had some compactness of structure, missed the linguistic lyricism of their prototypes. She was intelligent enough to realize her shortcomings, but died almost at the moment she felt she was making a breakthrough. Amrita's work carries interesting lessons; it shows that a traditional art-language cannot be brought alive by playing around superficially with its visual ingredients; they have to be used within a valid total concept'. (p.30).

And see then how logical in retrospect the ferocity of interruption immediately after independence; the need to seek the vitalizing force elsewhere and to test the difference (even Subramanyan himself needed a Matisse to discover his own traditions), to translate the apprehensions of illegitimacy on the one hand and a voice not a quarter-century older but feigning the perennial, an

immaculate martyrdom, on the other. See the shift:

These new artists were lone travellers; some travelling smoothly, some perilously, some flashily. Most of them had a kind of professional insularity. Their ideas never spread out wide enough to have deep concern with social issues, even issues related to art language. Even if one sums up the notions that the more articulate among them offered, it does not amount to much; even Souza's well-worded diatribes. But one cannot deny that they were sensitive men, and they turned out some noticeably individual work. But they cannot be taken to have added much to the Indian art scene if you look at it from a kind of long perspective. (p.37).

While Geeta Kapur in 1977 on the same subject:

"Souza singularly lacks or rejects the quality of compassion and though there are spurts of an aggressive sort of pity, the spiritual experience is injected with a deadly rancour. Suffering is ignoble, he proposes in his images, and there is no trace of sublimity in the face of those he shows to be suffering. In this context his relationship to Christ is crucial because in Christ is incarnated the suffering of man on earth...."*11

And see finally the deadly irony in this. At a time when we are slowly, painfully even, coming to see the realities of our situation -- when the interruptions are beginning to yield their formal options to us -- it is the unities he offers so tantalisingly that are proving the most elusive. When metaphors for envy are being replaced

by decapitation, he is substituting the container for the primal metaphor with his speech. The courage! The mistake!

LANGUAGE FOR THE DIASPORA

Geeta Kapur, we have said, succumbs, but we soon see a strategy in operation. She avoids edifices--it is evidently problematic given that she has to contend with a tradition that would perceive itself in edifices. She works round this with something she draws from Subramanyan's method of working -- what she proposes as the symmetric juxtaposition of language and craft on the one hand and virtuosity and wit on the other. The moment you craft something you evoke a method that becomes language in the way it works. You bypass several authorial difficulties this way -- the responsibility of asking the question, `Is it working?' or worse, `Can it work?'

Of inventing a working system. But the inventiveness flows in at another point, of being sensitive not so much to the sign produced as to all its reverberations. In making the sign you invert it, sometimes mock at its ponderously predictable relations of production; and in the process you restore to the method the one aspect of craft that a machine cannot by definition possess, its virtuosity.

In a lot of her earlier writing, Geeta has had to limit her own inventive capacities as she has had to perform roles not always of her choice, with a few precedents and little contemporary support. Her own

pleasure in writing has been expressed as a kind of jouissance, e.g., `Yet, sharing as I do the kind of historical circumstances that have shaped these artists, I hope to have gained by this affinity certain insights which an art historian with a fully developed methodology would command with the sheer comprehensiveness of his approach....This is the thrill and enjoyment of writing on what is happening here and now'.*12 She has usually had difficult terrains to chart and has had to use terminology a little like pylons, to be securely wedged in as a particular idea or argument culminates and in turn provide the foothold for the next move. Here, writing on an artist she does not need to defend, or to interrogate, she is also freed into receiving the subtle shifts in meaning: to concentrate on a critical semiotics that interprets the unpredictable play of method with use-value.

The political importance of such play is evident: any system that is not fully and alienatingly industrialized will improvise-- will translate given meaning to uses quite different from the intentions that go into manufacturing it. What is often the most productive is not the central (economic) exchange, but what goes on at the periphery where `the possibilities of the signifier always exceed the limits of the signified, and you test your improvisatory capacities with it' (p.5). Now all societies have, from primitive times, made objects for use--and to evoke some of those traditions can simultaneously locate and even isolate the specifically capitalist notions of the function.

Certainly in Subramanyan's case they demonstrate the extraordinary variety of linguistic options available to an artist at once aware of his traditional inheritance as of the many modernist interventions made into it.

This generally is Geeta's thrust through the book. She starts out plunging right into the very heart of Subramanyan's practice and also to the one area that needs structuralist resolution -- pointing to its two extremes, his toy-making on the one side and large-=scale morals on the other. The very difference in scale suggests the similarity. The toy is the perfect play object with a materiality in optimum relation to its many fictions (Barthes); here, while in some cases its iconography may be traced to neolithic times, it is still seen and made and survives in its perishability, its near-complete independence from its commodity value. And Geeta points to the modernist counterpart of this tradition, `a new category of object, one which detaches itself from use as well as exchange value and conveys with mocking jauntiness the sign of its dysfunction'; except that here, with toys as with magical and iconic figures and of clay pots, it is the metaphors upon the function opened out in space and time that is the strength of this little tradition, its `deft capacity to survive'. Likewise the murals -- where a great many such objects and other `semantically more complete units' are prefabricated and then assembled as a linguistic bricolage comes into being. It is less the scale that is at stake -- more `the way a visual

unit...reduced according to some functional constraint...encourages the craftsman-artist to programme the design....at once standardized and variegated, the form working as a sign that is semantically versatile.

Such an investigation necessarily starts raising its own philosophical-ideological-linguistic problems and it is not enough merely to point to them. The tradition itself, as edifice, the medications, the language...she encounters the flow at its fullest in The Social Ground and has a tough negotiation. While it is perhaps true that the early Bengal artists have not been seriously subjected to modernist critique, it is also true that whatever debates have taken place might simply not have existed for all the difference they have made, e.g., to Abanindranath/Nandalal/Coomaraswamy/Satyajit Ray. They have survived, like Gandhi (who even made political use of this) as much through a kind of neo-traditional popular discourse that has simply entered the popular mainstream and into all its cultural rhetoric. It is to the eternal discredit of their followers and descendants that they actually believed this ahistoricism to replicate a living tradition.

What Geeta does is interesting: she simply evacuates the entire question of modernism from this stage of her argument, preferring to deal with its pros and cons via Subramanyan's oil paintings and, thus, on formal rather than purely ideological grounds. It permits her, as a sort of quid pro quo, to also evacuate the perennialism from the

living tradition, and to consider it in its historical specifics: as a configuration that took place in, was most relevant to, a distinct period of time (the first four decades of this century). The history thereafter that she charts is more or less workman-like, as she traces the initial wellspring of the movement, its concern with the environment that must be placed `in the context of colonial discourse in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' (p.16) that later deteriorated into a `kind of an Indian (regional, local) `naturalism' in both its practice and teaching.

Such an evacuation is beset with its own burdens -- of displacing and, depending on how far you can go, even replacing the terms received with demonstrably superior ones -- and sometimes she does not have the space to work it through. What of Nandalal Bose whom she calls `in a sense the most courageous artist of the nationalist period...{Gandhi's} comrade-in-arms in transposing nationalist ideology into creative practice'? (p.18). Even admitting that the Haripura posters are his best work, `the first and most felicitous use in the context of Indian visual art of images derived from popular sources serving political-populist purposes with a radical effect on both', would it help to read them better if one knew the function they were supposed to perform at Haripura? There, and at the Faizpur Congress before that, Nandalal's village craft exhibitions were supposed to legitimate Gandhi's own presence, at a time when he was taking a back-seat to some

of the most violent ideological divides within the party, and quite deliberately turning his back to the demands of the Kisan Sabha that agrarian reform be finally put on the political agenda.*13 Also, would the distinction between Nandalal, Binode Behari and Ram Kinker be seen now as more fundamental, given the very distinct traditions of art that have emerged from each?*14

The problem gets particularly tough because it cuts either way -- on the one side the tradition; and its particular discourse which we may for a moment equate with a parole, that can only be perceived as such from the outside. More precisely, from a diaspora: the condition of exile that is inherent to the tradition, and one which all too often is beset with articulating the very state against which it struggles. And on the other hand, ourselves: accepting and sometimes even volunteering to take on a burden that is not necessarily of our making, often reducing our speech to a kind of language or language-system, whose most disparate condition we often see in those western post-structuralist studies that attempt what Kumar Shahani once described as a `pathology of pleasure'.* To work through all this and to attempt a vital critical langue...

The burden is squarely on Geeta when she concludes this problematic chapter with the reference to Subramanyan's `irreverence' for the natural environment, saying that it `may well be a reaction, a modernist resistance to the modes of conceptualizing on and

representing nature in its superabundance' (p.21). For now on, to go beyond the pun and the parody, the mocking and the mischief, the myriad inversions of the presented sign, it is entirely up to her to see how far the discourse can actually become language.

She shows, in the next chapter, how formal modernist options were inducted by Subramanyan at various levels -- sometimes to extend his oriental preoccupations, sometimes to bypass its weaknesses. Considerably less interested in the painted subject than in the `linguistic variations upon the motif', he was also able to work a post-Cubist picture surface that was a `shining interface...between art and reality', and to the techniques of fabricating this elusive interface. Defining the subject largely in its generic mode, as its specificity is replaced with rhythm and decorate design, emphasizing the fabrication with a heavy calligraphic edge, he is able to work his own way to the modernist paradigm of surface as <u>diagram</u> (instead of as window/mirror, its naturalist similies).

As it necessarily must, the problem emerges: which modernism? And it is considerably more weighted by the point at which Geeta places it. How, for example, would Subramanyan's emphasis on structuring point to the `kind of futurist manifesto about the changing perception of reality'? The effort to inflate a `structuralist-semiotic enquiry' into one that would contain all the divides only leads to more controversy; she almost suggests that his

`active engagement with the linguistic aspect of art' and its `more anonymous style of expression' can somehow contain into itself what has otherwise become a more romantic `confessionally exposed self-hood'. That the oriental alternative--where art equals language-- may lead him to an `impersonal system of pictorial signs' that can engage with modernism precisely through its semiotic option.

Surely this is not fair, even though Geeta is being very considerate to Subramanyan: one rather suspects that she doesn't like the oil paintings very much. For if Ritwik Ghatak on the one hand and Amrita Sher-Gil on the other show anything, it is surely the utter resistance of modern ideologies of the traditional to yield to a living of their own changing experience of reality. And that, in any case, romanticism is by no means distinct from oriental art practice and not just in this century. Indeed, I cannot think off-hand of a single oriental artist -- surely there is none more that Yasujiro Ozu -- who can actually claim to be untainted by romanticism. Or to replace its `ontological considerations' with purely linguistic ones. (Even the khayal has been seen more precisely to be a classico-romantic rather than purely classical form).

The problem, I must reiterate, seems to lie less with art practice of whatever hue and more with critical language,: it is to that extent our problem. On the other hand it perhaps does have something to do with the practice of the critical subject, for Geeta only emerges from its

shadow fully when she is describing what seems unquestionably Subramanyan's best work: the glass paintings. Here finally she takes us beyond inversion and displacement and into the grand design:

> ...he demonstrates no serious intention at first and one could quite easily settle on a view that these paintings are a mere occasion for mischief, if it were not for the tour de force of style.

And we know that style is seldom an empty token. However, gratuitous and mannered, if it is truly engaging it is also significant; it is both a code and clue of the art object in context. We have already seen how Subramanyan highlights the seductive aspect of the technique and medium of glass-painting; how the pictures in turn resemble the fabled golden mirror; and what does the mirror do but give us back the sensuousness of the world in its ephemeral splendour? In this way Subramanyan makes a perfect pact between style and subject so that the pun, pastiche and plagiarism turns into pedagogy after all, but of the comic mode, a pedagogy tender and clinical about the arts of love. (p.42).

Even as the little tradition comes into the open, its arabesque rhythms expanding into the cosmic gesture and its follies to `an orgiastic display of energy that pushes familiar iconography far afield into social iconoclasm' (p.37), Geeta's writing emerges into its own. From the beginning she has depended heavily on a prose style of description that would take the pressure off the

linguistics itself, opening out new areas where the transformation might now be worked. And the critical prose she comes up with does not, to my mind, have a parallel in contemporary India.

I am, therefore, being unfair to her when I end this pointing once again to some difficulties; once again with language, or rather a dependence on linguistic theory. I do not think Geeta sufficiently interrogates Subramanyan's preoccupation with `art as language' both in his writing and his work. Her own style is a bricolage, which constantly generates ideas that she intends to work out through her description. In the process, however, she has completely internalized, what are to my mind, important questions about their narrative structure, a counterpart of `art as language'. For instance:

I want to conclude by saying that Subramanyan is especially interested in ornamental image structures that sustain iconic conventions on the one hand and allow narrative facilities on the other ....But equally I believe this to be a modernist preoccupation, this telescoping of the iconic and narrative by means of an essentially ornamental structure, which is in turn projected into what one may call a meta-structure of play (p.10).

There are simply too many questions here: one might even say that the conflict between iconic and narrative is almost <u>the</u> crucial issue for a lot of art forms -- cinema and theatre are obvious instances but painting and sculpture are also surely affected. I think the problem

would be something like this: narrative necessarily evokes a dialectical relation between space and time, and while we do have access to traditions of spatial sequencing, we are all too often lost with temporal sequence. One faces a crippling hegemony of space, when the temporal mode is simply abducted into the spatial: colour, for instance, would reveal this problem entirely. Now this hegemony constantly extends into other areas; while, for example, there has to be a consistent and necessary transference of meaning between narrative and iconic modes, I think the iconic actually causes a narrative elision, abducting the narrative production-relations into itself. It can take an even larger hue when art language starts abducting art-practice into itself-- by which I mean that the `gem-like compression of a figural motif' can start another kind of more abstract illusionism which is finally not all that removed from much-despised `realist' subject-matter. Consider how the J.J.School of Art moved in recent years so easily from portrait painting to (what they consider) high abstraction; consider how the very people who demand realist cinema also demand folk theatre, prefer the barren sentimentalism of Anup Jalota but want their khayal to be pure, abstract taanbazi.

Geeta suggests that the `ornamental' might be a way out, and this -- along with the decorative -- is a recurring thematic in her book. I might be completely wrong here, but the way I understand it, the ornamental largely deflects narrative towards space while it is the

decorative which still retains its temporal alternatives. I would even argue that this was perhaps the reason why the early Bengal painters emphasized ornamentation rather than the decorative,*16 the ornamental actually suppresses metaphor.

If this is so, I suggest then that such an investigation which would emerge from Geeta's book and her own stylistic resolutions, would actually help us get the first real leverage into the flowing continuities of the living tradition. To go beyond the symptomatic state, one that Umberto Eco likes to see in the comic-book image of the cannibal chief who wore an alarm clock round his neck like a bead necklace. To re-introduce the interruptions of time into the received pictorial sign.

NOTES AND REFERENCES.

1. A brief note on my use of psychoanalytic references: I am very close to both the voices represented here and I cannot but feel personally involved--feel included, responsible, threatened, guilty; such proximity is for me part of our condition today where many of the problems we are facing are ours which have not been imported, which do not lie `out there'. As a colleague recently pointed out, whereas so much of earlier mass-communications came in with the allure of `better things', of late it is increasingly concentrated on a purging of guilt and responsibility for what is around us. Given the responsibilities we have to admit to, it becomes particularly difficult to state our dependence on anything, which is why we sometimes settle for reactive `language-systems'. I can only hope that these references, in their use, will finally fit into a possible tradition for us. This reference is to Melanie Klein: `When the objects are reintrojected, they become the ideal and persecutory roots of the super-ego. In the depressive position the objects are persons: mother, father and eventually the parental couple. They are seen as whole objects, both in the sense of being persons and in the sense of not being split into totallygood and totally bad figures. The relation of the object is ambivalent and when it is introjected it becomes the depressive super-ego. This super-ego is a loved object and attacks on it give rise to a sense of guilt.' Hanna Segal, Klein, Fontana/Collins, 1979, p.124.

2. Kumar Shahani, `Innovations', Framework, 30/31 London, 1976.

3. Jacques Lacan, Ecrits, tr. Alan Sheridan, Tavistock, London, 1977, p.47.

4. Ibid, p.217

5. Ibid, p.218.

6. Ibid, p.218.

7. Ibid, p.67

8. Ibid, p.55.

9. Kumar Shahani, "Interview" with author in Framework, 30/31, London.

10. Nandalal Bose, `The Paintings of Rabindranath', in Vishwabharati Quarterly, Nandalal Number, Vol.34, Jan.

1971, pp. 110-113.

11. Geeta Kapur, Contemporary Indian Artists, Vikas, New Delhi, 1977, p.17.

12. Ibid, p.xx

13. The events that took place at Faizpur (1936) and Haripura (1938) have of course been extensively documented. Gandhi himself writes about folk art in 1936 (see the Tendulkar biography, Vol.VI). For a complement overview see Francine Frankel, India's Political Economy, OUP, 1978, Chapter II.

14. I refer to the major revaluation of Binode Behari that took place in the late 1970s when Geeta Kapur herself and other artists of her generation discovered afresh the Medieval Hindu Saints mural. Or the efforts to re-think Ram Kinker by practising sculptors today.

15. Kumar Shahani, `The Self As an Objective Entity', Rita Ray Memorial Lecture, Calcutta, 1987.

16. Nandalal Bose, in his `Notes on Ornamental Art', emphasizes the importance of the pause thus `Pause includes spraying, light and shade, and modulation of movement. Without pause the ornamental work appears clumsy and monotonous. Sometimes the pause is replaced by space or it is made more distinct by modulation, i.e. making the movement either slow or rapid, and sometimes the pause itself is brought about by different variations of depth in light and shade'. See Vishwabharati Quarterly, Nandalal Number, Vol.34, 1971, p.95. Note how the entire argument elaborating Abanindranath's Some Notes On Indian Artistic Anatomy' (1914) works towards the notation of pure space.

APPENDIX 3

"QUESTIONS AND DIALOGUES"

A dialectical situation arises in the cultural arena. A group of artists consciously reject the practises of the `mainstream' and mobilize into a radical new-left collective to search for a pedagogy of art, an alternative `philosophy of praxis'. This critical act turns the compound questioning eye on everything, seizes the present moment, stands crude, naked and knife-sharp, and will not allow anyone to pass.

Antonio Gramsci in his `Prison Notebooks' lucidly states our position-"Creating a new culture does not only mean one's own individual "original" discoveries. It also, and most particularly, means the diffusion in a critical form, of truths already discovered, their "socialization" as it were, and even making them the basis sof vital action, an element of coordination and intellectual and moral order. For a mass of people to be led to think coherently and in the same coherent fashion about the real present world, is a "philosophical" event far more important and "original" than the discovery by some philosophical "genius" of a truth which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals."

The philosophical question haunting history and the consciousness of artists, more acutely in modern times with the global expansion of capitalism is, what is man? and, what can man become? In as much as man does not exist

alone but consciously and intellectually interacts with other men, the natural world and the world of things to transform them, he is a political "species being" who creates history. History is, therefore, this process of becoming or humanization of man. In the swamp of class-society, the swamp filled darkness of repression, all `human substance' is petrified. Yet through the swamp voices have risen: vital potential voices of `man'. In radical art, in radical thoughts, in radical philosophies, radical literature, radical scientific achievements, revolutionary struggles: pushing against the wall. A politics of resistance and discovery, a continuous human search for truth and knowledge to enlarge the world and its meaning, struggling for a classless freedom for every man - as a necessity and the ultimate freedom from that for a realization of true humanism.

In art, taken as aesthetic strategy and intellectual and philosophical struggle (located absolutely in the material and philosophical conditions of the present, carrying a national and global consciousness of today, to change this), the search for a persona and voice and a search for an authentic history are interlinked. They demand an uncompromising consciousness of `nationhood' through which an artist can speak to his people and at the same time stand in the world arena shoulder to shoulder with the community of universal human and artistic truths. The criteria and meaning of `nationhood' has become significant under the pressures of Imperialism and

Social-fascism, especially if we see this not in a causal relation to history or as a populist slogan, but as closely connected to the idea of the freedom of `man' which can only be realized within the concept of a nation.

Indian Nationalism, for all its passion and sincerity has been unable to develop this philosophical and revolutionary potentiality contained within the idea of nationhood. It has remained fatally attached to the limited perspective of gaining independence and preserving it. The Congress leadership, submissive to what George Steiner calls "the imagined garden of liberal culture" originating in 19th century England, has failed to fully undertake the process of decolonization and radical independent modernization. In the tacit conviviality of private enterprise, government, national leadership, bureaucracy, educational institutions, cultural platforms, in the attitude of the bourgeoisie, the educated petty bourgeois and the intelligentsia, there emerges under the veneer of liberalism, secularism, nationalism, quasi-socialism and scholarly practise, the philosophy of the dominant majority, the Hindu philosophy, which has turned the state, its supporters and its slogans into fascist ones.

Today, Indian society is a complex class and caste society, hooked onto the diabolic mechanism of world capitalism since the early 19th century; susceptible to its dominant logic in the political, economic and cultural arenas. It is, therefore, I believe a gross mistake a view from across the line, to overlook this fact in any dialogue on Indian

history, culture and art.

In the forty years of Independence, our Art, reflects these very problems. Out of a colonized consciousness of fear, arises a concurrence of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois classes (from which the artists are drawn), with democracy and its myth of progress and freedom, in which the role of an artist is marginalized and tolerated in the same fashion as the `opposition' as a sulking pet dog. The artist learns to `perform' as a juggler or a cynic the `labour of Sisyphus.* He struggles defensively without fully comprehending the forces he is struggling against and therefore what he is struggling for. The questions that arise are, therefore, formal or pseudo questions, far away from the real issues.

During the National Movement, an authoritative nostalgia was widely generated in the arts, for the lost coherence of a centre that held, over and above the objectivities of historical fact and processes. Notwithstanding the perspicacious and sensitive scholarship of indologists like E.B. Havell and Ananda Coomaraswamy and artists like Abanindranath Tagore, they created an overpowering mythical vision of Indian cultural history and art traditions from a feudal bourgeois point of view. In the process they rejected the most advanced humanistic thoughts of the time arising out of the philosophy of dialectical materialism, but turned instead to idealist organic streams of thought which were incapable of understanding the world under capitalism as a totality. The artists associated with such

scholarship, in the Bengal revivalist movement, dispersed strategically to all the prominent art schooled in India, at Santiniketan, Lucknow, Delhi, Lahore and Madras to entrench this parochial vision on a national scale.

The after life of the same vision continues today in the philosophy of the 'Living tradition', which seems to be a fetishistic form of the earlier Nationalism. It contains an inability to live in one's own time, and is also a strategy to survive in it. K.G. Subramanyan, searching for a "total" holistic vision of art as against the 'fragmented' sensibility of the modern,* locates his philosophy on the idea of an "electric plurality" within the traditional hierarchic interpenetration of the 'little' and the 'larger' manifestations in art and culture. In an essay 'Do we need an Art Movement' he writes "If one walks through the state of Orissa, for instance, village to town, you can see a whole spectrum of these simple wall decorations of untrained tribal housewives, the work of the village potter, metal worker, muralist with greater skill inputs the works of various skilled craftsmen like the silversmith, whose figures work is no less refined than a 'Lippold' and weavers whose geometricism and colour sense will do credit to any modern artist or designer, then the well known temples with their astounding sculpture. You can see this in many parts of India. The ordered circuits of their activity as against the adventurous and self-defeating cross circuiting of the modern scene I have described should certainly make us think and recall

Coomaraswamy's statement that while artists can be special kinds of men all men can be special kinds of artists (without each being a Michelangelo or A Cezanne). In fact some of the specialities of certain levels of these activities come from their simplicity or unambitiousness, even unconcern about being art".

Today in our situation, it is difficult to accept Subramanyan's great nostalgia for the collective practises of proto-capitalist, moribund village and town economies. What is his idea of historical process? When he speaks of the potter the weaver, the tribal woman as fixed in history, with no right to a choice of expression, all in the name of an "electric plurality", a grand hierarchic design which should not be disturbed, he speaks with a paternal false-humanism of a feudal bourgeois. Obviously, for him state capitalism and class society are eternal unchanging institutions.* Yet, capitalism having destroyed at the root a collective way of life, has destroyed the raison-d'etre of folk art. Therefore to speak of a living tradition in art and culture, outside the perspective of socialism is to parody, or make a pastiche of the same. This is increasingly evident in the cultural policies of today where folk art and culture are being preserved and marketed as precisely a parody, to satisfy the increasing historical appetite of the bourgeoise.

Folk art can no longer economically sustain in any honourable fashion, the craftsmen involved in it. What then is the reason for its survival if not as a political

act of resistance against the phenomena of forgetting that capitalism entails. Organic historic memory is a preserve of these pockets of culture, one which cannot be seen formally or appropriated or sold in a sophisticated urban context outside the organized vulgarization of history which has become a symptom of our times.

The other mainstream modern Indian Art carries an ambivalent relationship, one of admiration and rejection, to the whole revolutionary drama of 'Modernism' played out in Europe between the mid 19th to the Mid 20th century. Fundamentally the resistance is located against the radical-intellectual strains within modernism especially its apotheosis of science, its contemporaneity, its knowledge of the world made available through research in anthropology and sociology. Its objective materialist engagement with reality, history, truth, utopia, its close connection to philosophy, literature and the other arts, its resistance to the freezing of the 'human substance' under capitalism, expressed in psychopathological escape, moral protest to attempts at objectively and scientifically interpreting reality as a totality, in its multifaceted dimensions, both individual and typical. Art under modernism became a measure of humanistic concern in the blood-stream of an artist engendering a clash with the old syntax of visual language, its untenable philosophic content, in the changing times.

The Indian artists, influenced by the sensibility of the older Victorian and post-Victorian bourgeoise could not

fully penetrate this materialist humanist tradition. For them its forms and ethos were "variously ugly, dissonant, obscure, scandalous' immoral, subversive and generally anti-social".*1 And yet this same has perversely fascinated them. By appropriating modernisms attractive features as a 'style' and a method of avant-garde art practise, its original spirit was in fact 'vulgarized'. Ironically they have usurped the anarchic classless freedom of the modern artist not as a struggle, but simply as a corollary to their profession. This conveniently place them outside the problems of 'real' history, outside questions in class terms, somewhere between the workings of subjective consciousness and phenomenology. From such a position the imaginary, personal and historic events and characters are put in inverted commas as part of their commodification which can serve the artist as 'referrants' to make all kinds of critical gestures, even gestures of anarchy and protest.

This is related in fact to the cannonization or institutionalization of 'modernism', its reduction to a set of dead classics in Europe around the '50s' when the Indian artists contacted it. The waning of its effect was given rise to a whole new phenomena of post-modernism. This philosophy was the cultural logic of multinational capitalism in which a new populist rhetoric was slowly taking over the older modernist, metaphysical concerns with truth and utopia. Ideologically it was celebrating a commodification of culture and demonstrating that the

omnipresence of the class struggle which had haunted modernism was now in retreat.

When we examine broadly the features of the post-modern (after Frederic Jameson's brilliant analysis of it in an essay "the cultural logic of capital", we find that with the exception of a few artists like Amrita Sher Gil & Binod Bihari Mukherjee, the majority of our artists have submitted in a lesser or greater degree to the overpowering logic of the same. What is this philosophy then, which is freezing the blood of artists all over the world. Frederic Jameson writes "....aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally; the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel seeming goods (from clothing to air planes), at even greater rates of turnover assigns an increasingly STRUCTURAL function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation. Such economic necessities then find recognition in the institutional support of all kinds available for the newer art from foundations and grants to museums and other forms of patronage". Post-modernism is therefore a triumph of capitalist aesthetics, one from which Indian artists without knowing it have been unable to escape.

In a literal sense post-modernism brings with it an obvious superficiality. It focuses on surface and features of the surface, smoothness, or textures and marks and multiple surfaces which stubbornly resist an opening up into depth, even in a literal sense. Everything is as if held on the

surface - a flatness prevails, which is reminiscent of mechanical reproductions. Colour and principles of construction are apotheosized and the art product begins to resemble a commodity in the market with a new anti-human autonomy over 'man'. All search for 'real' history is replaced by a pseudo historical depth. In the absence of the old artists monadic ego which compiled him to struggle for a distinctive subject and a style as unique as his own physiognomy, "the producers of culture have nowhere to turn to but the past.* There emerges a "random canibalization of all the styles of the past, the play at random stylistic allusion".,*2 Here the past or history becomes a mere referrant, concerned with 'textuality' and the 'glossy qualities of the image'. All this is prompted by a growing "consumers appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo events and 'spectacles'*3 In post-modernism then, parody and pastiche, kitsch and 'camp' tastes rule. In the assembly line, in the marketing copy, in the museums and galleries, all art all philosophies are made to look aline, to compete. Glamour irons out all radical differences. In the myth of individual freedom,individual choice reigns supreme and opportunities appear endless.

The Narrative movement, in India, in recent years, taking character, from the British example and continuing a tradition of colonial patronage and approval; is the Indian version of an archaeology of historicism emerging from the post-modern. Through the history of art, Narration has

been a special method which places the 'individual' in the 'historical' axis i.e. it dialectically confronts the 'inside', 'outside' perception of reality of the artist through his protagonists, to face the special temper of his times. However, within the narrative mode also lies the danger of dramatic incidental storytelling, of creation of arbitrary situations and facts which deny the political and intend to surpass history. I believe, the great Narrative tradition whether Indian; from the Ajanta murals, to the sculptures at Sachi, Ellora and Mahabalipuram of European; from Piero della Francesca to Michelangelo's Last Judgement', to Bruegel to Courbet right upto Beckmann and Leger, does not fall into a populist rhetoric by compromising individuals and events and history of their times. The narrative paintings of today do not seem to escape from this very populist rhetoric, which I have mentioned earlier, is post-modernisms triumphant 'historicism' which can consume and in the process devalue almost anything, even the past.

The paintings of this 'Narrative' movement appear to stand in a critics court to argue their social and political consciousness, their scholarship and painterly virtuosity. The events and characters portrayed are subordinated to principles of structuring and surface design, and carry a causal relation to historical processes. With the use of multiple references what we have called 'textuality', with the use of pseudo historical content, with the use of narration, with the use of a rhetorical tone, a myth is

created which says that, that which is being portrayed is reality and the 'historical'. I fail to see how, without seriously examining the politics of visual language and subjects, (i.e. their particular existence under bourgeoise aesthetics) how it works, for whom and from whom, to attempt the 'historical' is to 'vulgarize' the same. Further, to pledge a preoccupation with the human figure and to be unable to draw and paint it freely and imaginatively, with a depth of observation and knowledge, certainly speaks for the shrinking sincerity and ability of artists, one that can never be justified with any theoretical argument.

Any art tradition, Indian or Western, offers a philosophy of understanding 'man' in his surroundings. Within each exists a definite method of observation, of study, of gathering knowledge, a developed linguistic system by which this can be expressed. In any case, whatever his or her choice, an artist's skills must be sharp enough, his means viable enough, to penetrate the world around him in its material and philosophic truth.

Related to this whole new phenomena of art practise is a growing cultural leadership has acquired a determinist role in the arts. Pure-intellectualism indulges in polemical complexities and exercise in thought in a rarefied atmosphere. As professionals and specialists they articulate their thoughts outside class-terms. Antonio Gramsci discussing the role of such scholars writes, "The Pure intellectuals as elaborators of the most developed

ruling-class ideology were forced to take over at least some Marxist elements to revitalize their own ideas end to check the tendency towards excessive speculative philosophising, with the historical realism of the new theory in order to provide new weapons for the social group to which they were allied".*'

We do not want to see the relationship between intellectuals (artists as special kinds of intellectuals) and the masses in mechanistic terms. In a theoretical leadership of intellectuals of the faceless masses (outside any real contact) we see distinct fascist tendencies. The only alternative to these existing modes of art practise, appears to us in a collective organization of artists to recover lost pedagogic didactic values of art. By organizing radical activities outside the dominant cultural itinerary we believe we may stand somewhere between mass consciousness and the pure intellectuals, directing in the process both towards a more meaningful and truthful engagement with reality.

In this brief critique of the post-modern and apotheosis of the spirit of high modernism, I do not in any way suggest a step backwards. In fact features of the post-modern are definite cultural symptoms of our times on which we stand. Yet we cannot deny within it a loss of values. Ideologically the formation of our group is related to all these issues I have argued above.

Our group takes character on the decision of its members, not on anything else. In the crisis of our times, we

believe that a philosophy of praxis other than one of an isolated artistic search is demanded of artists avoid the inevitable petrification of life and art under capitalist competition and the exercise of individual ambitions. Our commitment towards a political pedagogy in art, places a heavy responsibility on us. It is no easy decision. Only via a politicization of consciousness and a reaffirmation of true nationalism perhaps, we can return to our real past, understand history outside the will of the dominators with the knowledge of the most advanced global philosophies and science. As artists our real battle lies in our work, against all forms of kitsch; national kitsch international kitsch, political kitsch, social kitsch, social-fascist kitsch, feminist kitsch. The jargon of generalizations is overwhelming. Sameness mundanity, banality make us nauseous. The battle, as much as it is outside, is within us.

In such a large group of artists sharing a particular history, sensibility and vision, it is quite remarkable that there emerge distinct directions of individual enquiry. The old monadic ego is not dead. The search, and resistance of my friends, visible in their Art, will clarify I believe, what I have written.

A sleepless wind is raising a sleepless song in sleepless heads in sleepless nights.

ANITA DUBE
Baroda, 1987.

FOOTNOTES

* This phrase is used by Rosa Luxembourg to describe the trade union struggle which she considers a defensive struggle in which the proletariat seeks to achieve the best conditions possible but within the Capitalist system. The labour movement and parliamentary reform movement she feels occupy themselves only with one side i.e. the formal side of democracy without questioning its 'real' content.

* This is an unnecessary polarization since the modern with all its fragmentation is constantly preoccupied with the utopia of 'total' man. The fragmentation Subramanyan refers to is probably a symptom of the post-modern and its waning of values. But Subramanyan's own works, his murals, his terracottas and his glass paintings for all their wit and clever references to the 'little' tradition paradoxically do not escape many aesthetic features of the post modern namely flatness, impenetrable surfaces, a turning to the past as a search for historicism etc., which I will discuss a little later.

* According to Rosa Luxembourg - The necessity of determining the final goal of socialism provides the teleology by which it becomes possible to understand the present as a process of becoming. Without this teleology bourgeoise society would have to be accepted as essentially eternal, and social analysis would be reduced to empirical inductive methods which are incapable of dealing with capitalism as a totality.

1. Frederic Jameson : The Cultural logic of Capital; N.L.R. 146.
1 & 2 - Frederic Jameson : The Cultural logic of Capital N.L.R. 146
3. - Frederic Jameson : The Cultural Logic of Capital N.L.R. 146.

1. Antonio Gramsci Marxism and Modern Culture : quoted in Marxism and Art. ed. Maynard Solomon, Harvester Press.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archer. W.G. India and Modern Art, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1959.

————————. Kalighat Paintings, London, Victoria & Albert Museum, Her Majesties Stationary Office, 1971.

Archer W,G. and Mildred Archer, Indian Painting for the British 1977-1880, London, Oxford University Press, 1955.

Appaswamy Jaya, Abanidranath Tagore and the Art of His Times New Delhi, Lalit Kala Academy, 1968.

Bagchee Moni, Ananda Coomaraswami, A study, Varanasi, Bharata Manisha, 1973.

Bartholomew, R.L. and Shiv S. Kapur, Hussian, New York, Abrahams, 1971.

Baudrillard, Jean, The Revenge of the Crystal; Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny 1968-1983, London, Pluto Press, 1990.

————————, For a critique of the Political Economy of Sign, New York, Telos Press, 1981.

Benjamin, Walter, Charles Baudelaire ,A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, London, Verio, 1985.

————————, Illuminations, Ibid., 1984.

————————, Reflections, Ibid., 1986.

————————, One Way Street and Other Essays, Ibid., 1976.

Berger John, The Success of and Failure of Picasso, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1966.

————————, Art and Revolution, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1969.

Burger Peter, Theory of the Avant-Garde, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984.

Chatterjee Partho, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1986.

————————, The Nation and Its Fragments, Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994.

Joshi, V.C.(ed.), Ram Mohan Roy and the Process of Modernisation in India, New Delhi, Vikas, 1975.

Coomaraswami A.K., Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1974.

————, History of India and Indonesian Art, New York, Dover Pub., 1965.

————, Origin of Buddha Image, Caltutta, University of Calcutta, 1970.

————, The Dance of Siva, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Pub. Pvt. Ltd., 1977.

————, The Transformation of Nature in Art, Dover, New York, 1956.

————, Rajput Paintings, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1916.

————, Figures of Speech and Figures of Thought, London, Luzar, 1946.

————, Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon, New York Farran, Strauss, 1964.

Durai Raja Singham, (Compi), The Wisdom of Ananda Coomara Swami, Published by the Compiler, 1985.

Fanon Frantz, The Wretched of the Earth, New York, MacGibbon and Kee, 1965.

————, Black Skin/White Masks, London, Penguin, 1971.

Fergusson James, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture, London, 1876, 1910.

Foucault Michel, Madness and Civilization, New York, Pantheon, 1965.

————, The Birth of the Clinic, New York, Vintage, 1973.

————, Death and the Labyrinth:, The World of Raymond Roussel, Golden City, New York, Double Day and Co., 1986.

————, The Order of Things, New York, Random House, 1970.

————, This is not A Pipe, Berkeley, University of

California Press, 1981.

————, History of Sexuality, Vol.1, An Introduction, New York, Pantheon, 1978.

————, The Uses of Pleasure, History of Sexuality, Vol.2, Pantheon, 1985.

————, The Care of the Self History of Sexuality Vol.3, New york Pantheon, 1986.

Gautam Judith Mona, Through Indian Eyes: 19th and Early 20th Centy Photography from India, New York, Oxford University Press, 1982.

Navroji Dadabhai, Poverty and UnBritish Rule in India, Bombay, 1873.

Gladstone Soloman, W.E., Essays on Moghul Art, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1932.

Gordon Colins (ed.), Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings (1972-77), New York, Pantheon, 1980.

Gutting Gary (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Havell E.B., Art Heritage of India: Comprising Indian Sculpture and Paintings and Ideals of Indian Art, Rev. ed., Ed. by Pramod Chandra, Bombay, Tarapore-vala, 1964.

----------, Handbook of Indian Art, Varanasi, India Academy, 1972.

————, Essays on Indian Art, Industry and Education, Madras, 1910.

Inden Ronald, Imagining India, Cambridge, Basil Blackwell, 1990.

Jakobson Roman, Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time, (ed.) Krystyner Pomorkshev and Stephen Rudy, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1985.

James Joseph, (ed.) Art and Life in India: The Last Four Decades, Shimla, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1989.

————, The Madras Metaphor, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1994.

Kapur Geeta, Contemporary Indians Artists, New Delhi, Vikas, 1978.

————, K.G. Subramanyan, New Delhi, Lalith Kala Academy, 1987.

Kosambi, D.D., Exasperating Essays, New Delhi, Peoples Publishing House, 1992.

Kuklick Hernika, The Savage Within, The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991(93).

Lacan Jacques: Four Fundamental Principles of Psycho-Analysis, New York, W.W Norton & Co. 1981.

————, Ecrits, A Selection, Ibid.

————, Feminine Sexuality, Ibid.

————, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book. 1, Freud's Papers on Techniques, 1953-1954, Ibid.

————, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book. II, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psycho-Analysis, 1954-1955, Ibid.

Lipsey Roger, (ed.) Coomaraswami, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977.

Marx. K., Karl Marx; A Selection , London, Verso, 1975.

————, German Ideology, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1954.

Marx, K. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Chicago, 1904.

————, Grundrisse, New York, Random House, 1973.

Metcalf Thomas, R., An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and British Raj, London, Faber and Faber, 1989.

Mitter Partho, Art and Nationality in Colonial India, 1850-1922, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Panofsky, Erwin, Meaning in Visual Arts, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1970.

Poggoli, Renata, Theory of the Avant-Garde, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968.

Rosenberg, Harold, Art Works and Packages, New York, Delta Books, 1971.

Sarkar Sumit, Modern India, (1885-1947), New Delhi, Macmillan, 1983.

Smith Vincent A., History of Fine Arts in India and Ceylon, Bombay, D.13 Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1969.

Subramanyan, K.G., Living Tradition, Perspectives on Modern Indian Art, Calcutta, Seagull, 1987.

————————, The Moving Focus, New Delhi, Lalit Kala Academy, 1981.

————————, The Creative Circuit, Calcutta, Seagull, 1992.

Sundaram V., Kapur G., Amrita Sher-Gil, Bombay, Marg. 1972.

Tara Chand, History of Freedom Movement in India, 4 Vols. Delhi, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1961.

Thakurtha Tapti Guha, The Making of a 'New Indian Art: Art, Artists and Aesthetics and Nationalism in Early Modern Bengal, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Thelweit, Klaus, Male Fantasies, Vol.1 Women, Floods, Bodies and History, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1977 (93).

Viswanathan, Gauri, The Masks of Conquest, Literary Study and British Rule in India, London, Faber and Faber, 1990.

Journals

Art in Asia Pacific.
Critical Inquiry
Cultural Critique
Diacritics
History and Theory
Journal of Arts and Ideas
Lalit Kala Contemporary
Marg.
New Left Review
New Literary History
October
Third Text
Social Text

Catalogues

Dube Anita, Questions and Dialogues, Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda,1987.

Kapur Geeta, Contemporary Indian Art, Royal college of Art,England, 1982.

--------, Place for People; Bombay, Jahangir Art Gallery,1982.

Pratiloma Drishya Bodhathinethire Kalakaranmar Sanghadikunnu (Malayalam) (Artists Organise Against Retrograde Visual Sensibility) Calicut, Town Hall, 1989.

Unpublished Papers

Paniker Sivaji, Indians Radical Poverty and Sculptor's Association, The Crisis of Political Art in Contemporary India, Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, 1992.

Paniker Sivaji etc. Art Subjectivity and Ideology: Colonial and Post Independent India, (Paper presented to Seminar in Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla 1994).

I

Fig I to VII, portraits, (1982-85), clay.

II

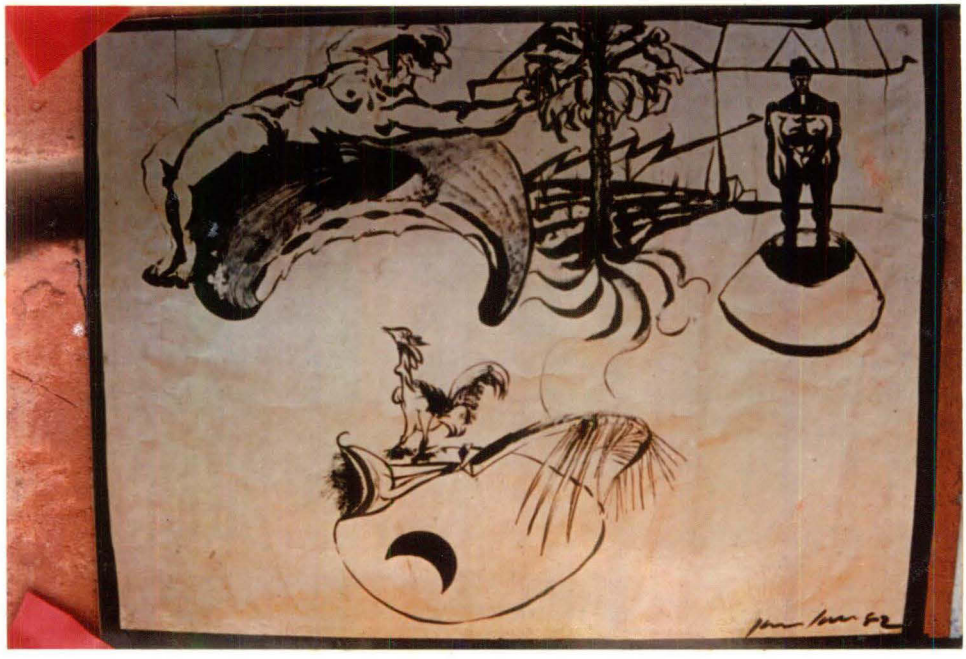
VI

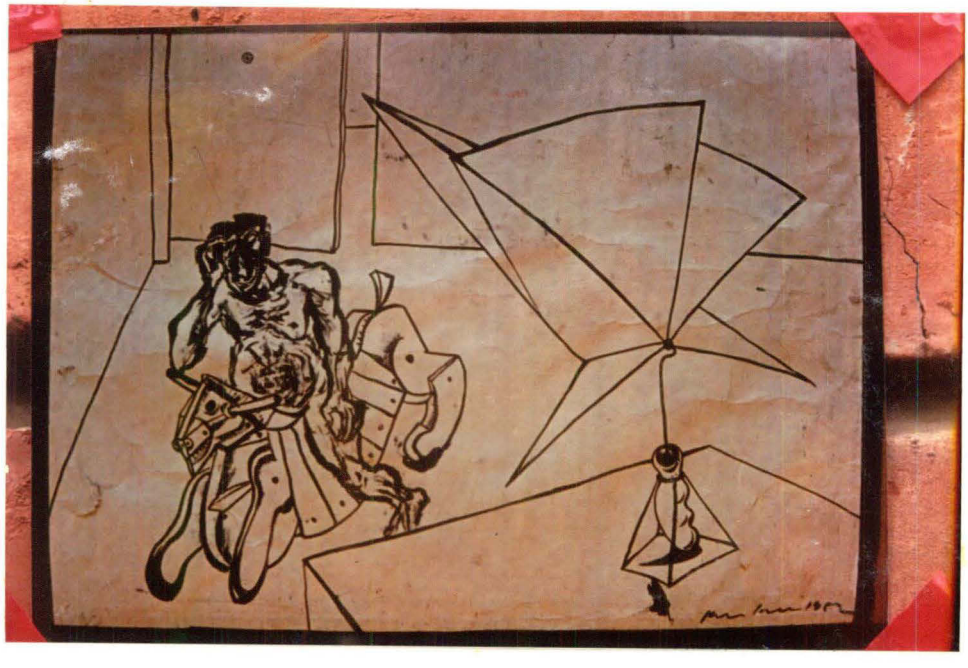
VII

XIII

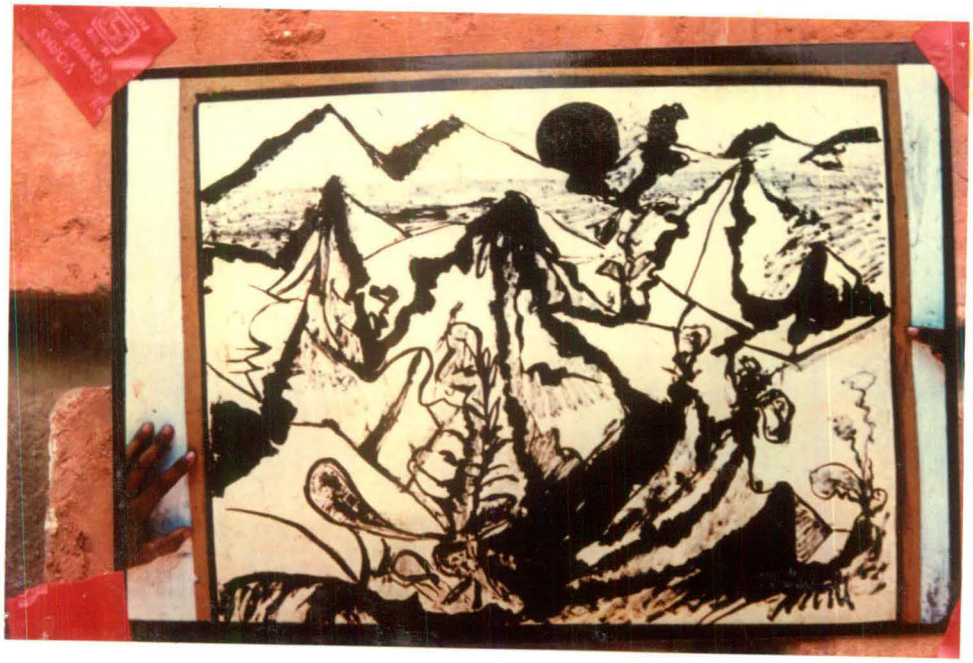
Figs VIII to XIII, Drawings, Indian Ink on paper, Coll. Ashish Mulkur.

XIV





XII



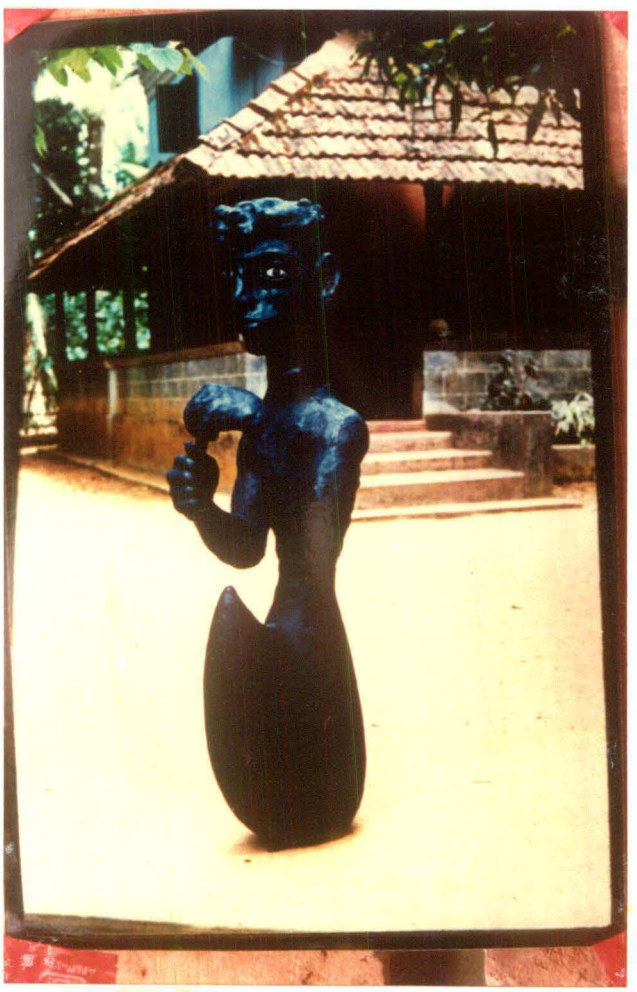
XIII

Boat man, 1987
Fiber,
Work destroyed.

XIII

Boat man, 1988, Fiber.
Coll. Artist's Mother.

XIV



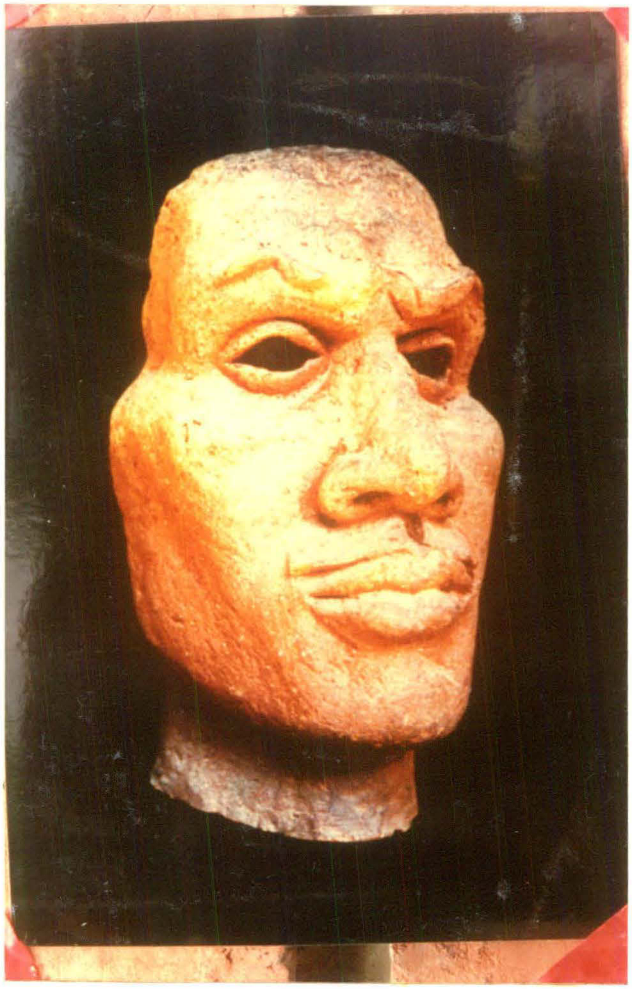
XVI

XVI

philosopher, 1988, - Fiber
collection. Ashish's Mother.

XIX

Revolution and Flowers. 1989
Coll. Artist's Mother.



xx

Self portrait, Mask. Terracotta.
1988. Coll. Arhiliti Molhu.