

## **Modern Indian Painters**

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In India, a long-standing engagement has existed with belief in the universal aspects of the 'modern', especially in art, since art has addressed the universal through a language that gained world-wide currency, historically, by the end of the second decade of the twentieth century and lingered on for about four more decades. Abstract though it may sound, this is, in a nutshell, the story of the received modernism in India.

The forties progressive avant-grade harnessed the anxiety of universal modern from an essentially urban location. There were plays of zeal, and youthful eagerness to prove the mettle of being an Indian and being part of the world at the same. The scenario started changing during the 60s, when young experimentalists engaged in and found differences with the general acceptance of universal modernism. This engagement and difference with the immediate past ushered in an era that forms a significant signpost for the Indian modernism, via narratives and otherwise.

As a result of the protracted engagement with various visual traditions, a richer and differentiated field of language consciousness emerged, a consciousness that treats art as a special communicative field and believes any tradition to be a matter of shared signs, codes and values. Thereafter, a quest for an indigenous identity would only seem natural, forming a sub stream in the field of art. Indian modernity in its postcolonial ethos, is a search for identity; and unlike the period preceding it is not uni-local and confidently contextual. Hence there are many contexts and fragments via which the desire for the earlier quest for the universal gets routed.

A number of artists, at location as varied as Delhi, Baroda, Santiniketan and Calcutta worked under a direct or indirect influence of this indigenous impulse. At a remove, if we cast a fresh glance at this newly emergent situation, we see a widespread disappointment with euphoric and heroic urban modern, leading to a reengagement with the untapped resources.

Artists who started their career then, in a true sense, encountered the euphoria of nation building in its ebb, they found that very heroic form has its end. The concern over the language overtook many other issues in a big way. Along with this a fresh attention was paid to

the human figure, a move that helped artists explore the possibilities beyond the institutional limbo.

Gulammohammed sheikh, Nilima sheikh and Bhupen Khakkar, later known as a part of the larger group called Baroda school, would gradually show up this tendentious pull to narrative, for what has harnessed in the theory and practices were the yet untapped 'storytelling' that forms the mainstay of communication in India. The narrative current was pervasive by the seventies; several artists started exploring the narrative method as a great deal richer and better communicative device. Across the schools and institutions these spread to different locations, we have Sudhir Patwardhan, Jogen Choudhary, and Arpita Singh who have continued with that aspect for awhile now.

Things were to work out within the fresh discovery of narrative; currents that sought to explore the variegated aspects of narration as the main stay of Indian cultural practices. At a different level, the variegated aspects of culture were discovered to be a signpost for the representation of the Indian, as against the canonical. The popular and folk were some among them.

There were many other aspects about the sub terrains of culture that were to be explored and eventually were explored via the route of the popular and/or in folk imagery-as in Subramanyan, or, in Sheikh; this continues to be support for many of the artists from within the representational practices today. In the works of these artists, they reveal the historically self-conscious in them.

There were moments in the Indian contemporary art practices when abstraction started gaining currency, Kolte apart from being a pedagogue, beings to the second generation of those abstractionists, whose works and sensibility are close to mute but intimate poesies, where surfaces and substance get into a dialogue.

The social did come up in a big way during the sixties as well: within that you can place the encounters with the obdurate: Manu Parekh and Rameshwar Broota form a duo within this show wherein you could possibly visualize a current of thought getting realized-set of anxieties not fulfilled a set of issues not being addressed by the nation or the state.

Indian modernism thus has encompassed a great deal of subjective currents to have arrived at a poignant dialogic point. The plethora of challenges that it throws up to the viewer is not only via attenuated and precise viewing points, but also via those vents where definitions are scarce.

It would also interesting to see how the social features in the metaphoric of paintings- Sheikh had explored the literal via very direct representation of a slave in the city during the late fifties, but the later years he portrayed his homecoming from within the referential hold, between the experiential and the textual.

Overall, the fragments of the narratives of Modern in India has got an advantage, it doesn't offer a single resting place but are constantly moving entities between points and pathways; a tale at large, of how at the end of an abstract universal concept, an increasingly self-conscious local took root.

