A Brief Study of:
Nasreen Mohammedi, Biren De,
K.C.S. Panikar, Jamini Roy, S.H. Raza
Nasreen Mohammedi

Nasreen Mohammedi, whose introspection found expression through a geometrically disciplined abstract idiom all through her life, was untouched by the basic anthropomorphism intent; embedded in Indian art. The condensation of symbology, iconography and subjectivities of metaphysical paradoxes, was evacuated by Nasreen Mohammedi. Her ink on paper coalesce the pure abstract thoughts of Kaimir Malevich, Kandinsky, Op art and minimalist.

Nasreen Mohammedi found her niche particularly in disengaging the representational ethics with a supporting mentor like Gaitonde, in 1960s, in Bombay and colleague, Jeram Patel in Baroda.
In the early period like many other contemporary artist Nasreen also experienced transitional phase which gradually settled with her strong sense of silence of desert. A deep silent trajectories of Nasreen’s work starts with lyrical mode inspired by Kandinsky and Paul Klee. (A vertical watery stroke at the edge of the paper suggested an approaching storm, or the sky was made eventful by majestic sweeps of soil red and black colour). In her diary she mentioned “again I am reassured by Kandinsky - the need to take from an outer environment and bring it an inner necessity,”, which may be the extended perception of her late 1960 “The new image for pure rationalism. Pure intellect which has to be separated from emotion... A state beyond pain and pleasure. Again a difficult task begins.”

Further, she worked with a sense of shadows, the shadow of the Hiroshima victim on the rock, she replaced the icon with the indexical sign that is always determinedly against the symbols as well.

A strong Eastern aesthetic sense of fleeting, evanescent, always at the point of vanishing, and taking the view with it, and the spontaneity of Chinese and Japanese painting is visible in her work from late fifties through the sixties.

Her first hand interaction with European abstraction came
at the age of seventeen when she was studying at St. Martins School of Art in London, which lingered on as foundational base later after her return to India in 1958. She used oil and ink mixed with thick, flat-tipped brush with hard bristles or a roller, and the oil was allowed to seep into the paper on either side of the colour. A saturated red or watery grey-blue with sepia or black seems to be utilized for its tonal and textural values which was later eliminated by the use of black ink. Her calligraphic brushstrokes are visible in her later pen and ink drawings, which later resembled with Arabic inscriptions in her desert landscapes.

The nature-bound imagery, calligraphic brush work and tonal and textural seduction gave way to pure abstraction in early seventies at her arrival to Baroda as a drawing teacher. Her aesthetic temperament finally turned towards the potential austerity of an abstract idiom devoid of colour. Her fascination for sanded desert of Gulf, the terraces of the Mughal movement accented by linear patterns, the geometric arrangement of the sandstone slabs of Fatehpur Sikri, the variations of the rectangular slabs, irregular crisscrossing of their fitting, the narrow streak of shadow of a water channel across the field, terrace steps descending into a square water tank shown in her photograph series, the intricacies of her mediating design of the cobweb, it
seemed inevitable that the idiom of Op - Art would be appropriate to reflect her own inner turmoil, which was searching for some clear-cut order by the late 1970s.

In the early days at Baroda she began to use straight lines measured and drawn with the help of the geometrical scale. Mark by mark, small ink drawing evolved into a grid-like structure. During late seventies her drawings and large, built up into a close-knit web of silken lines. Diagonal Intersecting with the vertical and horizontal lines of the grid itself creates a regulated pulsation across the surface. The drawing thus generates surface movements and under currents that vary in different parts of the paper.4

Her inspiration also came from post war abstractionists of French tachistes like Mathieu and Michaux in her middle 1960s biomorphic forms. She was also, strangely enough, interested in technology, in cars, in industrial movements, in water storage tanks, in the street, telegraph wires, airport runway, cameras, and precision instruments and architectural drawings and architectural spaces.

With the minimalists such as Carl Andre or Angnes Martin north American, Zen and Tao, She shared precedence in non-platonic thought. While the Minimalists used a language of
abstraction, their mode differed from Abstract art in that the latter is posited on the platonic idea of representation as a reflection of the natural world.⁵

Jamini Roy

Jamini Roy's turning towards the folk tradition was not the reaction against the Bengal school but the realization of his own culture. "the important point to recognize is that he approached folk art not as an out sider, but as one who had intimate knowledge and understanding of the living experiences of the people where lay the roots of the folk culture itself".⁶

Jamini Roy went back to the primordial experiences of the community village life, exposing the archetypal. In Jamini Roy's painting, a figure, an animal or any ornamental motif cannot be understood at its face value. He transforms his objects and figures with the intention of uncovering a stream of experiences shared by the community. His choice of subjects consisted by the elements of ecstatic dancing, the rhythms of music and song, animal motifs, etc.

"His art started a trend not only in the fine art but also in illustration, design and revival of handicrafts is one of the major achievements of our time, but we owe to Jamini Roy the vision to
reconsider the varies of folk art and to incorporate it in contemporary work something of its vitality, gaiety and innocence".7

The abstraction in his approach achieved quietly to be realized by the evaluations. He never intended to bring about any abstract element, but his work is identified with the process of abstraction where imitation of forms are of identical as its main approach is towards expression. The simplification of forms and colours are remarkably contemporary which made Jamini Roy works widely accepted. It is non familiar to lots of people in Asia, in Europe - East and West, in Africa and in America where he has countless admires.

"It is sometimes asked why an orthodox Hindu who has never even read the new testament should be interested in the subject of Christ. Jamini Roy gives several reasons. In the first place, he wanted to find our if his new technique could be applied with equal effect to subject remote from his personal life... he wanted to show that the human and the divine could be made one only by abstract, symbolic means. In particular, one can find a close parallel between Jamini Roy's studies of Christ and the anonymous French folk - painters of the 12th century whom Gauguin copied".8
To approach the philosophy of Biren De's Tantric thought one requires to find the beginning and the end of the leading thread of the whole, on which it is based. It grows with the line of Indian tradition.

His Tantric concepts are based on the truth of union of Siva and Sakti or Purusha and Prakriti, the spheroid, which stands for the world - egg, Bindus, which is the focal tension, the creation of this universe. Specifically one find in each of Biren De's canvas a center point which constitutes its pivot is the invariable center immovably fixed and serenely poised of the unmanifested (avyakta) around which other forms of the manifested (Vyakta) fold and unfold.

"Biren De's arrival at this stage of plastic statement has not been a sudden one. It is the result of a long and arduous journey through life. It is the ultimate achievement of a power which is crowned by compassion - a silent and potent power that points towards transcedence".⁹

Biren De's preoccupation with the concept of man-universe relationship, his efforts at pictorial depiction of manifestations of a supreme energy in man and nature could be seen even at the
time of his years at the Govt. College of Art in Calcutta where he studied from 1944 to 1949. Though he acquired proficiency in techniques of Western three-dimensional approach to painting, his interest was mainly in human body and mind. His compositions though were totally abstract as he declares "They represented the pressing (somewhat romantic) urge within my developing consciousness to explore the unknown and the unknowable. Questions regarding origin of Life, meaning of life itself, man's evolution from purely physical to spiritual state, existence of God etc., were troubling my immature mind at that time. All this resulted in some strange compositions -arrangements based on thin, muted colours and strong unbroken lines, with titles such as: Energy, Path, Quest, God, etc. They were tentative, unsatisfactory essay, and certainly not Art., but they recorded faithfully the workings of my grouping mind".¹⁰

Biren De's inspiration sources also came from the tribal people Kole, Veel, Oraon and Santhal during his Calcutta period. His visits of Hardwar, Lachmanjhula and Rishikesh, south of India and Bengal Mathura and Vrindavan inspired him for spiritual expressions "In my own way I was trying to assimilate these two seemingly desperate experiences of mine: one with the tribal folks and the other with the seekers of truth; one vital and raw, the other austere and serene. To me a synthesis of the two was the ideal, as I felt they
were only two different manifestations of the same source - energy. So my canvases continued to depict sadhus, monks, vaishnavis, the private symbols of the shrine, the mystique of the conch and the trident, the saffron mantle of renunciation and the blue of Mokhsa, as well as full blooded tribal couples and south Indian devadasis in various stances and moods."\textsuperscript{11}

Biren De does not directly accept his any association with Tantra as he says "It was a logical development of mine, I was interested in having man and Universe together; that was my journey ..." His understanding on Tantra goes like this; "Tantra is expansion of your consciousness. All three faculties exist simultaneously; objective realism, fantasy and a urge to transcend... The energy that you see in my work is not because of some God, "guru".\textsuperscript{12}

K.C. S. Panikar

"...My work of the words and symbols series, started in 1963, using mathematical symbols, Arabic figures and the roman script, helping me create an atmosphere of new picture making which I seemed very much to need... in the course the Malayalam script more congenial. The scripts are not intended to be read. To make them illegible I introduce strange shapes and characters in between the groups of letters. The symbols and diagrams, the tabular columns etc. have no meaning
whosoever other than their visual aspect and images born out of association of ideas".\textsuperscript{13}

The Madras School Artist K.C.S. Panikar represents the best intimacy with his consciously adopted calligraphic motifs as a regular pursuit in order to move into the world stream of art, he used the script in a more painterly context. Apart from the problems related to intimacy or visual image, Paniker adopted different script as one of his fundamental motifs in order to build up his canvases. Tamil or Malyalam characters of the script in his compositions hardly denote any meaning, content or clue to the painted surface, yet, these characters are so integrally interwoven that if they are presumably removed form the canvas there would remain nothing except the dead shaded or silhettetted, elongated parabolas or allied monochrome geometrically based shaped.\textsuperscript{14} K.C.S. Panikar went on with the researches into the discipline of figuration which he had started while at the college of Art at Madras. \textit{In his words and symbols} series he worked off the ego consciousness and its burden of emotion with an extremely craftily organization of purely syntactic graphic conventions.\textsuperscript{15}

In uniform and equal strength, the script flow sometimes vertically and sometime horizontally in spontaneous character harmonizing to the tune of the monochrome spaces. His way of
using the Indian script on the canvas is the best example of Indianization of modern art.

S. H. Raza

"Whatever the direction art expression may take, the language of form imposes its own inner logic and reveals infinite variations and mutations. The mind can perceive these mysteries only partially. The highest perception is to an insensitive order, where all human faculties participate, including intellect, which is ultimately a minor participant in the creative process. This stage is total bliss and defies analysis".16

S.H.Raza always aimed at pure plastic order through which he expresses his deepest concerns of nature and elemental philosophy. The early paintings of Raza resonate with profoundity as does a full throated alaap in Indian classical music. His later artistic approach towards the genetic vocabulary of point, the line, element and colour and structural unity, all signifies his quest as “the task of art is to make things visible so that they may become objects of reflection”.17

The bindu the natural elements, terrestrial explorations, fertility symbols and other issues bordering Indian spiritualism, have persisted in his painting over the years without a tangible evolutionary credibility. For:
“The kinds is a sign with marker metaphysical implications. Like a seed – vital, a symbol of human, natural and universal energy”.  

In pursuit of his preoccupation with landscapes, town scapes, temples, and village in his early paintings he says, “It was an impressionistic style - more or less European, because our whole curriculum was based on Victorian thought”. For him the construction of a picture and colour is very important.

His formative period took 25 years to reach a certain point. At a point he went through the lyrical abstraction and then towards Indian music like rags and raginis.

Raza emphasizes that music is co-related to his work. He refers to a large canvas called Germination: “there is a preplanned structure, with something akin to teen tall, with the possibility of dividing the space and time into squares, and where the colours are arranged in a certain order to create almost an orchestration of lines, forms and colour. Something akin to music”.

The paintings done in acrylics, in Zamin 1971, and Oasis 1975, this vision and perception is freed further from the slightest reference to representational elements. There are no specific forms that relate to architecture or to the forest, nor is there any indication of a point of view or a perspective, A dark, calligraphic structure or a series of impetuous notations float over a variegated
field of continuously placed motifs which are luminates and streaked and veined with membranous textures.

For three or four years, Raza underwent a period of thought process – until he came to the realization that his vision had something to do with the bindu. His perception goes as: "it punctuates our manuscripts. It is a sign with major metaphysical implications, like a seed vital, a symbol of human, natural and universal energy".21

The significance of the bindu developed gradually in Raza's mind. Ever since Raza received the full revelation of this symbol around 1975, his work has revolved around this seed.

The metaphysical awakening, the fertility symbols as in Ma and other issues bordering Indian spiritualism, (we have Naga, Jala-Bindu, Tree of life and emergence have) persisted in his paintings. His canvases depict a point that becomes a circle around which there are four lines that make it a square. At the heart of the circle a horizontal and vertical line intersect – and there are colours, radiating energy.

The act of painting is a form of yoga, he analyses. "You have to be so near to it, that you stop thinking about yourself. You become a part of the whole activity, and some of the best paintings are created in this elevated state where reason has little access. It is not the intellect that decides, it is the instinct and essentially intuition, that have the upper hand".22
REFERENCES-I


2. Ibid, P.85.


5. Ibid, P.173.


11. Ibid, P.32.


16. As told to Anahita Contractor, "The devious inner Eye", The observer of Business and politics, Feb 92.


19. Ibid, P. 91


22. Ibid, P. 93.