

## METAMORPHOSIS OF INSPIRATION, EXPLORATION AND CELEBRATION IN THE GENRE OF DRAWING

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### **Abstract**

*This research paper highlights the genesis and development of the genre of drawing in an exhaustive and expressive manner, studying the intricacies involved in inspiration, exploration, and celebration of aesthetic and psychological elements, which go into making drawing- a separate and complete genre which was hitherto considered as a preliminary exercise to painting. It also studies the long journey of the dedication of prominent Indian Contemporary artists who have raised this genre to monumental levels at national and international scenarios exploring the social, emotional, philosophical, traditional, and cultural perspectives.*

### **Keywords**

*Drawing, Prehistoric drawings, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Albrecht Durer, Botticelli, Delacroix, Ingres, Chinese & Japanese Ink Drawings, Simonides, Bireswar Sen, Jogen Chowdhury, Laxma Goud, Kathe Kollwitz, J.Sultan Ali and Satwant Singh.*

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*'A drawing is simply a line going for a walk'* - Paul Klee

### **Introduction**

In the beginning, there was the spoken word which expressed different emotions, and then during the course of evolution, prehistoric men living in caves closely started observing and capturing Nature around them, by imitating or drawing their forms in their own innocent and spontaneous ways, using simple hand tools made of wood, twigs, and stones, and pigments mixed with animal fats or blood to draw forms of animals, human beings, birds, reptiles and their day-to-day hunting activities. These drawings have amply proved the ingenuity of the human spirit and his creative lust to draw and express his more intense impulses and feelings. From that era till date, artists continued creating wonderful and imaginative works in the genre of drawing which a few centuries back was considered only a preliminary exercise for a painting or a sculpture. Today drawing is considered as a complete and independent genre with its own artistic charms, techniques, and aesthetic complexities. It passed through various terrains from sketching to free-flowing imaginative sojourns as one observes that its birth lies in sketching forms but ultimately as we closely examine the wonderful and intricate drawings of old masters like Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Albrecht Durer, Botticelli, Delacroix, and Ingres. These works are first specimens of intense drawings based on their inner perceptions, skill, and possessing a monumental creative acumen, having the ability to connect with the deeper essence of their narratives, thereby wonderfully expressing their inner world through their *conte*, ink, and brush or simply charcoal mediums. As we move around to Asia, we are enthralled to see masterpieces of black and white brush and ink drawings by Chinese and Japanese artists where one is mesmerized by the mystic misty mountains, silently cascading waterfalls, and rocks and boulders seated like hermits lost in eternal meditation. Magical brushstrokes unleashed by Chinese and Japanese masters have created poetic lyricism in countless shades of black and white drawings depicting chirping and preening birds, wonderful goldfishes merrily swimming against the swirling waves of rivers and ponds, branches of trees laden with cherry flowers, swaying bamboo trees in the wind and glistening pine-needles against the rising Sun presents a heavenly and ethereal world where peace and tranquillity float in the atmosphere. The genre of drawing is both complex and complicated. It requires hours of meditative dedication to bringing alive on paper or on canvas the eclectic stance of a particular subject. It also requires discipline as well as a deep sense of observation because in black and white drawing it is either yes or no, there is no middle path like we find in colored works which can conceal immature attempts by a practitioner. Looking at these masterpieces one is

reminded of the words by a Chinese critic, “*A single picture is worth ten thousand words, a single ‘good’ picture that is and not just anything dashed off on the canvas.*” Simonides, the Greek philosopher-poet further elaborates, “*Painting is a silent-poetry and poetry is a speaking picture.*” Our own master painter who excelled in miniature water-colors Bireswar Sen says, “*Nature to us is a jumble of lines and forms of bewildering variety and complications and the artist’s mission is not to imitate her as the camera does but to represent only the quintessence of the scene, its main and significant essentials, discarding all that is unnecessary or irrelevant. In other words, the artist is not a gourmand, but a gourmet, assimilating only the choicest morsels for his delectation.*”<sup>1</sup> This is a departure point between sketching and the genre of drawing where the inner soul of the subject is assimilated in a style preferred by an artist using his own selected materials.

In the contemporary context, several sensitive artists practicing the genre of drawing in India have excelled in this field and made their own mark which has the capacity to inspire the future generation of artists, as their dedicated and sustained efforts have resulted in idolizing this craft, infusing a deep sense of perception and conceptualization magnificently rendering the social and political aspirations, struggles and triumphs in the present day scenario in urban and rural precincts. Each artist has devoted a considerable time and energy in embellishing and shaping their inimitable stylization to portray the innermost chords of creativity, employing their own metaphors and symbols, inventing and reinventing the ultimate truth hidden behind the layers of intellect. This is an arduous and a private journey undertaken by each artist in demystifying the elements and narratives hidden behind the surface thus emphasizing on their inspiration, exploration, and celebration. One finds an organic synthesis of creativity and aesthetic charm followed by cultural and environmental surroundings which one often associates with common mundane or cliché subjects. But their journeys have to be closely analyzed to dig out the pearls from the deep oceans.

Focusing on the stalwarts of this genre, it is a sincere effort to throw light on all aspects of their creative journeys, their perceptions, and inspirations, besides highlighting their subject matters and artistic leanings and the styles they have adopted and mastered. These well-known artists include Jogen Chowdhury from West Bengal, Laxma Goud from Andhra Pradesh, J.Sultan Ali from Chennai, and Satwant Singh from Chandigarh (Punjab). Jogen Chowdhury was born in 1939 in Faridpur, now in Bangladesh, and moved to Kolkata with his family after the Partition of Bengal in 1947. Though he belonged to a well-to-do family of landowners but after his transition from Bangladesh to Kolkata, India, his family had to live in resettlement refugee

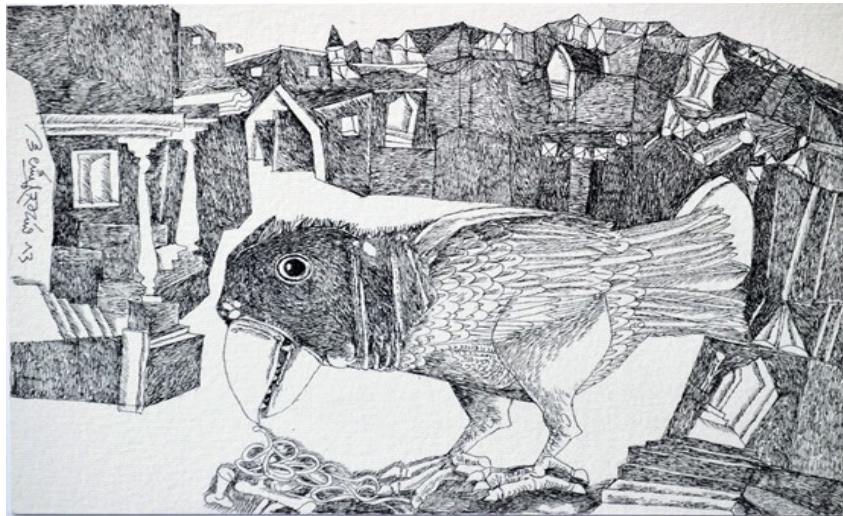
camps where gloom, hopelessness, and scarcity was in abundance, and the young and sensitive Jogen was deeply moved by the scenes of migrants living in subhuman conditions.<sup>2</sup> All of them were suffering from a great psychological as well as physical loss and were struggling to survive in these harsh times. He joined Govt. College of Art, Kolkata, and from the very beginning, he wishes to draw the gloomy and hunger-stricken people huddled together in small huts and ghettos. He minutely observed their facial expressions and the gestures of their limp and weak limbs. Old men and women in tattered attires with empty eyes and deep wrinkles on their faces egged him on to sketch them and fill his compositions with the images of helpless and tired people. Wrinkles and wounds on their faces and body parts presented stories of grief and pathos and the horrors of departing from their hearths and homes. In his intricate drawings done in black ink and pen or crowkeil, one finds stylized figures engaged in supporting each other holding hands, or caressing one another. **(Plate No.1)** He has an uncanny knack for detail and dramatization and has the capacity to represent the figures with their large eyes vacantly looking into the space and he has evocatively and effectively distorted the bone structures of human figures with large hands and knuckles. This was the time when people had also suffered due to the World wars. His other favorite themes were pastoral scenes- boys fishing on a boat in rural Bengal, a village fair, houses with thatched roofs- alongside figure studies in a recognizably urban setting. From a *kabuliwallah* standing on the lawn opposite the Indian Museum in Kolkata and portraits of friends, family, and strangers on the street executed in swift lines to sketches at the Sealdah railway station, where trainloads of refugees washed up. When asked about his moving and gripping figurative drawings, he explained that from the very beginning he wanted to create socially relevant art. Like many Indian artists of his generation, especially Bengali ones, he was influenced by the German artist- Kathe Kollwitz, best remembered for her depiction of hunger, poverty, and the plight of the working classes. Later drawings are seeped in sensuality where he has infused an undercurrent of eroticism by drawing women figures with enhanced physical attributes. These drawings present a manifestation of man and woman relationships seated or reclining against each other. Yet there reins an aura of mysticism and mystery on their faces. These human figures primarily portray their rural and rusty flavor. Deeply inspired by Tagore's drawings, he elaborates, "*I am a huge admirer of Rabindranath Tagore's work, his quest to capture the formless (arop) within forms (roop). There is no rigidity in his style, only a sense of openness.*" In the unbroken lines with which he often draws entire figures at one go, Chowdhury says he strives towards such a state of grace. "*A figure isn't inert, it has a force frozen within it,*" he says. His works are in all major art museums and with art collectors across the world.



Laxma Goud is one of the finest practitioners of drawing and he has developed a distinctive style of his own that carries the rustic smell of the tribal men and women engaged in their daily chores. He has infused a remarkable synergy in his drawings where people are in direct dialogue with Mother Nature. He describes his art as: “*There is eroticism in nature itself.*” Humour, earthiness, and vitality emerge as Goud transforms the characters of his works- man into goat, goat into woman, and man and woman peer lustfully at each other. Goud also explores man’s connection to his environment. Laxma Goud was born in 1940 at Nizampur in Andhra Pradesh. He did a Diploma in Drawing and Painting from the Govt. College of Art and Architecture, Hyderabad in 1963. He later studied mural painting and printmaking at M.S. University, Baroda. But his love for drawing continues till today as he feels he is one with God when he sketches or draws common people engaged in their own social and cultural activities, performing their day-to-day tasks like working in the fields. The elements in his drawings like men, women, goats, huts, vegetation, stylized tall trees, and tribal motifs and attires reflect his love for a peaceful simple, and laidback life where people bond over folklores. There is a playful magic on the faces of his women figures with quizzical eyes and expressive mannerisms. The works recreate the rural landscape as if it is frozen in time. In some of his fascinating drawings, he has used thin layers of colors here and there to enhance the visual charm. One finds an abundance of innocence, simplicity, and flora and fauna which is indicative of the bucolic naivety. Apart from Goud’s great narrative ability, the artist’s remarkable skill and sophistication in handling his medium (pencil or brush)

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are evident. A master draughtsman, Laxma Goud is a versatile printmaker and painter and has worked in a variety of mediums: etching, gouache, pastel, and grass paintings. Incisiveness, hatched lines and a keen eye for detail have been his trademark forte. Humans, short and stunted, mixed well with Laxma's botanical obsession. Branches drooped and descended stair-like to the earth, berries hung from shrubs; plants and saplings climbed onto a peasant woman's *sari*. The images which inhabit his drawings are common nails, chains, buckles, bottles, belts, and safety pins- all mundane reminders of the dull world outside nature. It is perhaps the pencil portraits that are most gripping: a blind eye revealing an empty socket, mill printed stripes on the dress, clumsy pendants on black strings, a parched and poverty-stricken skin sewn up with leather patches and thread. Sometimes pastel strips and prints break the monotony of lead black.<sup>3</sup> Nature and man remain Laxma's obsession. **(Plate No.2)** Recognizing his great contribution to the genre of drawing large number of art connoisseurs and museums, art galleries and institutions have acquired his works in India and abroad. He teaches us that we can find great elements of art in mundane things too.



Eminent writer and art critic Ulli Beier describes the work of J. Sultan Ali and writes: “*Sultan Ali's imagery is 'grotesque' or 'primitive' or 'terrifying'. His drawings have been described as 'expressionist'. Some of the themes depicted in Sultan Ali's pictures could indeed be terrifying, if handled differently. Here are some typical subjects: A black serpent swallows the king of the sun. The monster of sin is engaged in a mortal battle with the king of righteousness. Snake the destroyer tries*



*to strangle the Earth, but Garuda flies to his rescue. Birds play innocently on the river bank, oblivious of their extreme vulnerability. Only the great bull rests secure. He carries sun and moon, love and kindness in his belly. The conflict expressed in his pictures is not an arbitrary conflict: it is played out within the larger setting of a cosmic order that cannot be upset by the different struggles that continuously rage within it. The conflict between good and evil is a continuous preoccupation with Sultan Ali.*"<sup>74</sup> These intricate and eye-catching drawings done in ink and crowkeil borrow heavily from the mythology and folklore yet he has successfully transformed these strange looking elements and creatures into contemporary forms stylizing them at his will and requirement. These drawings appear as if these are pages from some ancient texts yet they convey the perennial impulses of man and nature and the inert desires and aspirations of humans. **(Plate No.3)** J.Sultan Ali was born in 1920 in Bombay. He studied painting at the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Madras in 1945. Patterns, designs, and textures in these drawings lend a flavor of decorative and pleasing charm. Though some drawings represent weird animals and other creatures in distorted forms yet these cannot be called ugly or offensive in fact the compositional and divisions of forms and elements provide powerful visual impact and overall these drawings have a distinctive stylization that is quite contemporary in treatment. His works are also enshrined in many important museums and art galleries around the world. Many contemporary artists have been inspired by his unique compositional aspects as these works have the capacity to mesmerize the onlooker.



*“I would rather die of passion than of boredom,”* says great painter Vincent Van Gogh. In a similar vein, Faiz Ahmad Faiz- the great Urdu poet elaborates on the very essence and essentiality of passion in an artist’s or poet’s life which roughly translates into that: *“Every moment spent in passion was rewarding/Although the heart had to endure much pain.”*<sup>5</sup> No wonder artist Satwant Singh feels that passion is a very elixir of life and creativity which runs deep in the veins of each creation. The genesis of Satwant Singh’s work is embedded in myriad manifestations of human passion which he feels is a pre-requisite for any worthwhile creation and it acts as a catalyst in bringing to the surface the complex impulses and desires buried deep under the sediments of the human psyche. Born in 1948 in the lap of Mother Nature, ‘The Queen of Hills’- Shimla, he studied art at Government College of Art, Chandigarh, and started his career from here. He joined the Government Central Crafts Institute for Women, Chandigarh, and retired as HOD ‘Design Faculty’. For a brief period, he also acted as Officiating Principal at this institute. He was included as Executive Member of Chandigarh Lalit Kala Akademi during the tenure of Dr. Alka Pande as Chairperson of CLKA. He was also appointed as Visiting Faculty at Chandigarh College of Architecture. His works are inhabited by chirping birds, leisurely roaming goats, majestic roosters, dark ravens, mysterious owls, mesmerizing mermaids, fairies, and dolls who have adopted the human limbs and these shockingly striking works depict half-human half-animal figures and represent Freudian thoughts on human cerebral evolution and mental evolvement. His paintings and drawings portray the circus of life and the cycle of life where predators and prey of various denominations are engaged in daily combats and the world is engaged in a mythical and mysterious balancing act of truth and mystery. There is a resonance of silent savage symphony which runs through the very existence of creation and the whole universe is woven in the tapestry of joys and sorrows, truths and myths, and life and death. One encounters a subtle presence of Jaws and Claws, Horns and Hooves lurking under the skin of the human psyche. His works are a true representation of matter and metaphysics, form and content engaged in interplay of Shakti and Creator. **(Plate No.4)** Each work of his comes like a winsome wine that was nurturing in the cellar for long and suddenly it has poured out in good measure, with passion put to the finest use. The viewer has transported into the complex symbology of the inner world of the artist and the erotic that meets the eye is a metaphor for his own creative urge. It is worked out so magically in a harmonious coming together of line, form, color, and texture. All this has been achieved with the long labor of love. The joy and the passion this artist feels in communion with his medium is communicated ever so spontaneously to the viewer.





### Summary

The roots of the genre of drawing were embedded in the soil of contemporary consciousness by these four well-known artists, who have devoted their lifetime to carving a niche for this genre as an independent and complete genre in the vast arena of contemporary art and they were instrumental in influencing and motivating a large number of fellow artists and even the young artists who keep on taking inspiration from the magnificent works of these artists. Due to their unshaken resolve and steady creative endeavors, drawing has become a very popular medium of artistic and aesthetic expression today and art academies, museums, and art institutions have recognized its artistic strength, impact, and visual power which instantly satisfies the creative urge of art lovers and connoisseurs around the world.

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