

An Overview of Contemporary Indian Art: Tracing the Folk-Legacy

Dr. Richa Kamboj

Associate Professor & HOD, Department of Drawing & Painting

M. M. P. (P. G.) College, Dehradun

Email: r.k.kamboj@hotmail.com

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Dr. Richa Kamboj

An Overview of Contemporary Indian Art: Tracing the Folk-Legacy

Artistic Narration 2021,
Vol. XII, No. 2,
Article No. 17 pp. 101-105

<https://anubooks.com/artistic-narration-no-xii-no-2-july-dec.-2021/>

Abstract

The indigenous element in the Art of a country imparts distinct cultural perception to it and simultaneously perpetuates the naïve art of the earth to exhale vital component in the prevailing socio-cultural scenario of a region -undergoing a rapid, rather fatal transformation in the name of modernization with pseudo perception. No tree can thrive for long if it is sans its roots. India is a land of rich cultural heritage where the aesthetic panorama had been sprinkled with assorted forms of folk art. The Indian Folk Arts and Folk lure, though the expression of unsophisticated rural folks, have always served the socio-religious and utilitarian purposes and have been a vital language of documentation of political transformation in the societies. As modest as the naïve folks of the rural India who lack formal art education, the arts of the indigenous bewitch the human hearts with sparkling colors, frank two dimensionalities, bold expression with minimum means, simplification underlined with creativeness where spatial and representational problems are resolved in innovative manners. When the art of the laymen and the modern society fraternizes, it exerts sweeping impacts of everlasting nature.

Keywords

socio-cultural scenario, folk arts, two dimensionalities, cultural perception, simplification, bold expression, aesthetic, folk motifs, and designs, stylization, linear colors

The indigenous element in the Art of a country imparts distinct cultural perception to it and simultaneously perpetuates the naïve art of the earth to exhale vital component in the prevailing socio-cultural scenario of a region -undergoing a rapid, rather fatal transformation in the name of modernization with pseudo perception. No tree can thrive for long if it is sans its roots. India is a land of rich cultural heritage where the aesthetic panorama had been sprinkled with assorted forms of folk art. The Indian Folk Arts and Folk lure, though the expression of unsophisticated rural folks, have always served the socio-religious and utilitarian purposes and have been a vital language of documentation of political transformation in the societies. As modest as the naïve folks of the rural India who lack formal art education, the arts of the indigenous bewitch the human hearts with sparkling colors, frank two-dimensionality, bold expression with minimum means, simplification underlined with creativeness where spatial and representational problems are resolved in innovative manners. When the art of the laymen and the modern society fraternizes, it exerts sweeping impacts of everlasting nature. Eminent Art critic Keshav Malik made a very relevant remark in this context when he wrote, “One may, even say, that the urbanite arts of India-paintings, sculptures, prints, etc. will have a telling role to play in the new Indian only when the two streams or two traditions of art and craft intermingle so to speak. As it happens only a few of our urban artists understand the crying need to connect and enter into a dialogue with the age-old sources of their own art and craft. To this extent, they, in a sense, are rootless and that despite.”¹The above statement by a veteran and eminent art critic of his stature arouses a serious concern in the contemporary art scenario.. It is a high time to contemplate over the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in India and on the onwards journey.....the road ahead

The indigenous art schools of Indian Miniature Painting - Mewar and Basholi were embedded with indigenous and folk elements. The overview of the contemporary art of India projects some artists whose art style is amalgamation of the folk and modern art. The legendary artist Satish Gujral (b.1925) accepts his penchant for folk art with frankness in an interview-”For example, my mural at the All India Medical Institute was done at a time when in my painting I was using rough texture and mechanical forms. Immediately after that, I began to work in college, and the folk motifs and design I was interested in are apparent in the murals at the Oberoi Intercontinental Hotel, Baroda House and Air India building.”²The arts of the earth had an equally penetrating impact on the psyche of M.F. Hussain (1913-2011) who acclaimed that, “my paintings, drawings, and the recent paperwork has been directly influenced by my experience of traditional Indian dolls, paper toys.....shapes galore. The experience of being with them, and the inspiration to create them are inseparable.”³ The paintings of Vasudev Balwant Rai Smart(1925-1999) who was a scholar of Scientific Research & Cultural Affairs at B.H.U., reveal his deep insight into the indigenous art of India.



J. Swaminathan, 'Tribal Motifs', Oil on Canvas, 31.5x45.5"

J. Swaminathan (1928-1994) who was a promoter of folk and tribal art as the Director of Roopankar Kala Museum at Bharat Bhawan, Bhopal, and was also a co-founder of the group-1890' in 1962 at Gujarat with an earnest urge to manifest what was indigenous in the Indian art, inculcated folk and tribal pictorial language in his paintings (prior to his latest work) which imparts a unique metaphor to his style.

C.D. Mistry (b.1933) from Gujarat is an artist whose paintings rejuvenate the Folk Art with such a vigor with his enchanting rich palette of fusing colors, retaining purity and freshness of hues in a subtle charismatic manner which mesmerizes his viewers. His paintings are a celebration of the simplicity of forms, stylization, flatness of space broken by arrangement of cold and warm colors in a manner that suggests depth.



Badri Narayan, Untitled, pen & ink on paper, 14.5x22"

The paintings of the eminent artist Badri Narayan (1929-2013) are marked by striking simplicity in execution of forms, emphasis on linear contours, stylization in treatment of nature and fantasy which brings his idiom of artistic expression close to Indian folk art.



Dhanraj Bhagat, Untitled, Wood, 27x8.5x



Manjit Bawa, 'Durga', 173.5x206 cms

The art style of Manjit Bawa (1941-2008) distinguished by the brilliance of colors, lack of three dimensions, tube-like boneless limbs of animal and human figures, reveals the impact of folk art on his subconscious mind. Being simple and modest at a time when complexity prevails, is difficult, so far as art idiom is concerned. Widely traveled Manjit Bawa was fascinated by the richness of colors and simplicity of people, the two characteristics which demark his work. His art education at College of Art, New Delhi from 1958-1963 where Dhanraj Bhagat, B.C. Sanyal, Somnath Hore, Abani Sen were his teachers, leaving an everlasting impact on the art style he evolved. Abani Sen's (1905-1972) inspiration to evolve figurative style who had a firm belief in Indian Folk tradition and at the same time folk element in the sculptures of eminent sculptor Dhanraj Bhagat(1971-1988) must have been the important factors in Manjit Bawa's realization of his artistic pursuits at a time when Western impacts were also prominent on the changing scenario of Indian contemporary art.



Madhvi Parekh, 'Christ on a Cross', Reverse Silk Screen on Acrylic, 40x60"



Madhvi Parekh, 'Goddess', Acrylic on Canvas, 47.5x71.5"

Madhavi Parekh born (1942) in a village Sanjaya in Gujrat, a self-taught artist creates a pictorial world underlined by simplicity, naiveness, boldness, two-dimensional approach, contours well defined by black lines, often side or frontal visages, cubical flexible limbs, figures with varied gestures in movements unrealistic, still arranged in a convincing manner on the space often waded through by motifs and symbols of the world of fantasy as well as nature, decorative inputs with subject matter ranging from Biblical themes to mythological and Brahmanical, strongly attributes folk semblance and fragrance of the earth to her work.

References

1. Malik, Keshav. (2010). Arts of the Earth', in, **Arts of the Earth: Folk and Tribal Art of India**, Ed. Siddharth Tagore (Art & Deal, New Delhi).
2. Vasudev, Uma. (1972). 'Why Murals: An Interview with Satish Gujral:', in **Lalit Kala Contemporary**, no. 14, April.
3. (1987). 'The Folk Inspiration in Modern Indian Painting', **Lalit Kala Contemporary**: p. 22.