

RAZA AND HIS GEOMETRIC SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION

Prof. Dr. Anju Choudhary

Principal

M.M.V. P.G. College

Kidwai Nagar, Kanpur

Email: principalmmv123@gmail.com

Dr. Satakshi Choudhary

Assistant Professor

R.B.D. College, Bijnor

Email: arunkesavan266@gmail.com

Abstract

Sayed Haider Raza is one of the most prominent artist of India of his generation. Raza was helpful in creating a specific modernist identity for Indian art along with the other prominent masters such as – M.F.Hussain, F.N. Souza and Akbar Padamsre, who were all the part of Bombay progressive Artist group (PAG). For his invaluable contribution to tradition art Raza has been awarded with PadamShri (1981), Padam- Bhushan (2007) and Padam –Vibhushan (2013) by the Government of India. Raza was also awarded the with the 'Prix de La critique' in Paris in 1956. Raza started his career as a expressionist landscape painter as he grew in the shade of nature but soon he take possession of abstraction by using geometric shapes and in 1970' he began to point with pure geometric forms, particularly the circle and the dot, which he compared to the idea of 'Bindu' or after 1970-80 his style of painting had been completely changed which was only formed by geometric shapes. As he linked his geometric expression with his spiritual thoughts. As Raza quoted – "The Bindu symbolize the seed, bearing the potential of all life". In the painting of Raza the black circle signifies the Beej or Seed –the starting point of creation. The faint (ethereal) lines forming the recurring invented triangles and the placement of the Beej between them is a representation of the womb, a sign of female fertility, working the budding of a plant from the seed. Thus for his Geometrical Spiritual expression he created Bindu. The 'Bindu' according to Raza, signified the rise of momentousness of spirituality variously interpreted as shunya (zero) or the void of nothingness in his works, it also served as a symbol of the seed which encapsulates the prospective to give birth to all life and is the focal point of both energy and creativity.

Except this symbolic expression Raza used vibrant colours which are according to the Geometric shapes. Geometry is the base of his art because geometric forms have cosmic energy and value.

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Prof. Dr. Anju Choudhary,
Dr. Satakshi Choudhary

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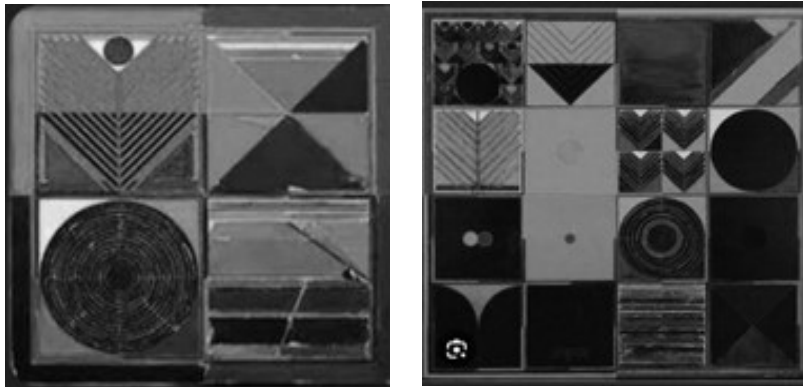
Keywords

Geometry , Forms , Bindu , Dot , Circle , Square , Geometric , Spirituality , Abstraction , Manifestation , Energy , Seed , Representation , Symbolic etc .

Sayed Haider Raza is one of the most prominent artists of India of his generation .Raza helped create a specific modernist identity for Indian art along with the other prominent masters such as – Hussain,F.N. Souza and Akbar Padamsre ,who were all the part of Bombay Progressive Artist Group (PAG) .For his invaluable contribution to traditional art Raza has been awarded with Padma Shri (1981) ,Padam-Bhushan (2007) and Padam –Vibhushan (2013) by the Government of India .Raza was also awarded the with the ‘Prix de La Critique’ in Paris in 1956 and became the first non-French Artist to achieve this award and later he was awarded by the highest French civilian honor the ‘Legion of Honour’ in July 2015 . Moreover , he was elected as a Ratna member by Lalit Kala Academy ,New Delhi in 1983¹ .Raza was born on 22 February 1922 in Babaria district Mandala ,central Province,British ,India ,which is now present day in Madhya Pradesh. He was a renowned Indian Painter who moved to France in 1950 but he could not leave India completely and he frequently came to India .His father said Mohammad Razi was the Deputy forest ranger of districtMandala .So he spent his childhood in very close to Nature which impacted his thoughts most .He took drawing at the age of 12. He completed his high school education from Government High School Dermoh .After high school he studied further at Nagpur School of Art ,Nagpur (1939-43) , followed by Sir J.J. School of Art ,Bombay (1943-47) and after that on a Government of France scholarship, He went to France in October 1950 to study at Ecole National Superior Des- Beaux .Arts (ENSB-A)Paris (1950-1953) .After completing his studies. He traveled across Europe and continued to live in France with his wife ,the French Artist Janine Mongillat and exhibited his work at Paris in France ,After the death of his wife Janine in 2002 . He came back to New Delhi ,India and continued to do painting until he passed away on 23 July 2016 in New Delhi at the age of 94.

Raza started his career as an expressionist landscape painter as he grew in the shade of nature but soon he took possession of abstraction by using geometric shapes and in the 1970^s he began to paint with pure geometric forms ,particularly the circle and the dot ,which he compared to the idea of ‘Bindu’ or after 1970-80 his style of painting had been completely changed which was only formed by geometric shapes . As he linked his geometric expression with his spiritual thoughts .It is a phase of his art that presents the enigmatic world of Raza’s paintings. No one knows certainly why Raza’s made quotient these geometric shapes for his painting

.It is always been a mystery as in his all paintings .Perhaps, when he frequently visited to India during his France migration .He had gone to Ajanta Ellora Caves ,Banaras and places in Gujrat and Rajasthan .His visits to these cities sparked his interest in Indian culture and he wanted to play a greater role in bringing it into the world .As he was much influenced by the spiritual tradition of India so he took his forms mainly Geometric forms Indian ancient and traditions. That's when the 'Bindu' was created.Once on asking Raza about what attracted him to a simple circle , he gave immense credit to his teachers as having a great influence on him .Especially his headmaster who ,at the age of nine taught him to calm his restless spirit and mind by meditating on one point ,which he drew on the wall .For him the most significant form was a point that could be expanded to a circle ,a circle which could be divided by two lines , horizontal and vertical as the intersection of these two lines created energy and these lines have the power to develop in the most natural way of a multitude of forms ,first the intersection of Black and White or later ,with energy, where color develop³ . So ,now his images were extemporization on an essential theme .That of the mapping out of a Metaphorical space in the mind ,the circle or Bindu(The dot or the Epicentre), presently became more an Icon ,virtuous in its symbolism .He installed his work in an Indian context of spirituality to convert it into a single point that became inseparable from his art .As Raza quoted –"The Bindu symbolizes the seed ,bearing the potential of all life"⁴. In the painting of Raza the black circle signifies the Beej or Sead –the starting point of creation .The faint (ethereal) lines forming the recurring invented triangles and the placement of the Beej between them is a representation of the womb ,a sign of female fertility ,working the budding of a plant from the seed .

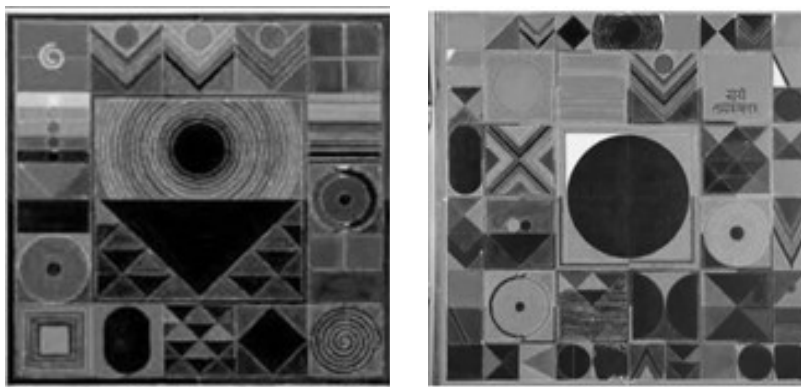


Thus for his Geometrical Spiritual expression he created Bindu. The 'Bindu' according to Raza ,signified the rise of momentousness of spirituality variously

interpreted as shunya (zero) or the void of nothingness in his works, it also served as a symbol of the seed which encapsulates the prospective to give birth to all life and is the focal point of both energy and creativity. Just as we could visualize Hussain by seeing paintings of those iconic horses, we could easily visualize Raza by the ubiquitous presence of the Bindu. While Raza's obsession with the Bindu gave his series an unarguable Indian flavor and authenticity, his interest in abstraction put him in a league with the masters of European modernism with wisely Kandinsky or Kazimir Malevich, to name a few. As a result, Raza would always hold a special meaning in the hearts of people of all sorts: Indian, European spiritualists, traditionalists and even hedonists. In this way Raza also wanted to follow abstraction in his art and for the abstract expression Bindu was his perfect form. Bindu is important as an energetic aspect of Raza's art. Analysing this he said, "In my paintings the dot emerges as a complement to Shakti—that which generates energy. As well as his paintings created in the five Primary colors reflect his search for the void." Another important form in his paintings is triangle, which reveals space, time and nature. Two intersecting triangles represent male and female energy. Through circular forms Raza explored Kundalini (Primal Energy). Thus he expressed his ideas in his paintings symbolically⁵

Except for this symbolic expression Raza used vibrant colors which are according to the Geometric shapes as to make clear the boundaries of these Geometric shapes. His early forms reflected a mastery of abstraction but after many years of travel, investigation and experimentation, he returned to Indian visual idioms for inspiration. S.H. Raza further decided the Bindu (Seminal source of energy), Beej (seed) as Garbagraha (sanctum-sanctorum or hallowed space) for his motivation. Furthermore, he mounted color with symbolic meaning and transmuted local visual traditions into universal yet connected with the personal spiritual iconographies. He also had been inspired by Indian metaphysical or spiritual thoughts. Thus, the most celebrated of the Raza art series has been derived from the Indian concept of "Shunya", meaning the abstract of nothingness and yet that which has the ability to add value to whatever it is affixed to. So to understand of Raza's art is to understand the deep-rooted spiritual philosophies that Indians have always propagated to the world. The time for manuscripts and palm-leaf stories had gone but Raza's manifestation of these philosophies will last forever. Although Raza lived much of his life in France, yet his works were inspired by Indian religious imagery and philosophical concepts including the Panchtatva (five elements of nature) and Bindu (the dot or the epicenter). Not only his colors and ideas were borrowed from Indian concepts but also he

started inscribing Sanskrit prayers ,chants , and Urdu and Hindi verses onto his canvases ,just like how the Ragmala miniature paintings have calligraphed verses on them.This shows his tantric approach which led him to Geometric forms ,Symbols and signs.



The Bindu was first seen in Raza’s paintings in 1980 and depicted the painter’s newfound vision and interest in Indian ethnography.He perceived the Bindu as the center of creation and existence ,stating that “Bindu is a source of energy. Source of life .Life begins here ,attains infinity here.” After the introduction of the Bindu Raza added newer dimensions to his thematic occure⁶ (task) in the following decades ,focusing on many different metaphysical ideas such as – Kundalini (primal energy), Nagas, Purush- Prakriti concept , pancetta etc. Considering the first painting in the Bindu series , Raza said that he was shifting to pure geometry towards the plain white canvas .This approach to simplicity and reaching back to the original form was not easily perceptible like that of the leaves .His concept became fiercely entrenched in his work in the form of geometric abstraction ,one being the progression and evolution of humankind ,this was a means through which he decided to creatively showcase all that existed in the world, we currently live in.

Bindu which is a miniature symbol of power concentration from which everything manifests and in which everything is immersed. So, the use of Bindu in his paintings is not like a pointless point ,but as the opening moment of the whole scene and this point is the center of attraction of the necessary energy and power .As Meera Menezes said in her piece , “S.H. Raza , an artist who showed the universe in a single Bindu” says that for Raza black was the mother of all colors –the point from where all energy in the universe emanated and into which it also converged .He had an odd sort of connection with the color black where he

felt that it had colossal potential the contending powers of light and dark .This could be revealed in a perception of new imagery and the creation of a new language⁷. Black space is a storehouse of such stored energies which are searching for their manifestation .



Bharat Bhoomi , 40x40 inch,serigraph on paper

Raza uses upright and inverted triangles radiating outwards from a central Bindu ,to convey the concept of dual female (Prakriti) and male(Purush) polarities ,around whose interplay and balance the universe is structured .The intertwined nagas or snakes at the very center of the piece reflect the same coupling the eternal duality of male and female ,day and night ,light and dark –that preserves the cosmic circle (cycle) of birth ,death and rebirth to presenting the key for Natural elements sky/space, Air ,Water,Fire greatest universal truths symbolically on canvass through five colors white, yellow, red, blue, and black .This indicates the five elements of “Panchatatva” of Hindu mythology on which not only the human body but also all living beings of the universe exist.Furthermore more the universe itself contains these five elements to maintain its functioning and his art world is also composed of these five elements .In the words of Raza- “I have kept the rays of the sun ,the spectrum of colors as the elements of my paintings .They can be other things also like relation , and emotion but for me these colors white ,yellow ,red .blue and black mix together to make all the colours in my paintings in such a way that their meaning is symbolic ,or it can be a symbolic suggestion .We have to know about the expansion of colours from inside. But when these colours are applied to each other or to say that they grow with life , flourish with creation ,then they are called health of nature or life of nature⁸Raza is a poet ,a philosopher ,and a spiritual man in depth⁹

The geometric shapes and strong or symbolic colours in Raza’s paintings sometimes have been mistakenly called it neo tantric art influenced by Tantric thought

but according to Raza and his friends there is no connection between his paintings with that school .Preoccupied with imminent energies ,he is a modernist ,mixed with the synthetic qualities of Art and its emergence on the surface.The art critic Geeti Sen has also commented on the tantric elements in Raza’s painting in a published monograph of Lalit Kala Academy and ‘Raza Anthology’ (an illustrated book published by Chemold Mumbai) To express the concept of five elements in his paintings,Raza takes recourse to the principles that determine the language of the picture using the abstract terminology of points ,lines, diagonals ,circles ,square and triangles to give an idea of the magnet power of the elements .Such a fondness for this pure geometry and inductiveness can also be constructed as an attempt at something similar to the formalist structuralists and even neo-tantrics .But nothing can be a bigger misconception for Raza’s art to think of Tantric.¹⁰ Similarity ,in Indian art today ,Daniel A. Hurwitz (Art critic) has written in Raza’s paintings about meditation (Dhyan) ,yoga ,a form of tantra .In this way A meditation dimension is seen in Raza’s paintings ,but in a purely Indian style .The importance of this meditation lies in concentrating on a central goal for Raza ,to which Indians call Bindu , which is directly connected on two paths –one towards energy has come many times in Raza’s works in Black Colour .As these symbols are meditative dimension of Raza’s work .His paintings evoke instinct ,as if they were filled with energy in themselves.¹¹

In this sequence in a conversation with Sarla Man Mohan in Dharmyug of March 18th 1984 Raza says –”Many painters have made the ‘Bindu’ that’s nothing new .This symbol has been around for centuries .These symbols have been around for centuries .There are many Tantric artists who are working on this .But their identity ,their origin ,their way of seeing , their way of understanding are different things and what I am doing has more to do with the creation through my own experience .I don’t care that people say that I have been influenced by Tantric thought because my way of thinking and my truth is different as far as I am concerned ,it is not a Tantric” Raza gave his perspective on the geometric relationship of his paintings “My current work is the product of two parallel curiosities .Firstly ,its goal is a pure formative system ,second its main concern is with the subject matter of nature .The two curiosity lines eventually meet at a point ,but separated from each other Bindu is a symbol of seed ,which in a way represents the possibilities of a holistic life holds on. It is also a visual form ,which in itself contains lines aura ,colour, vessel and space etc. ¹² Thus Raza only used the geometric forms due to their aesthetic value and spiritual basis .Geometric

forms have cosmic energy and value .So these were important for Raza ,to express his artistic narrations in the forms of painting.

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