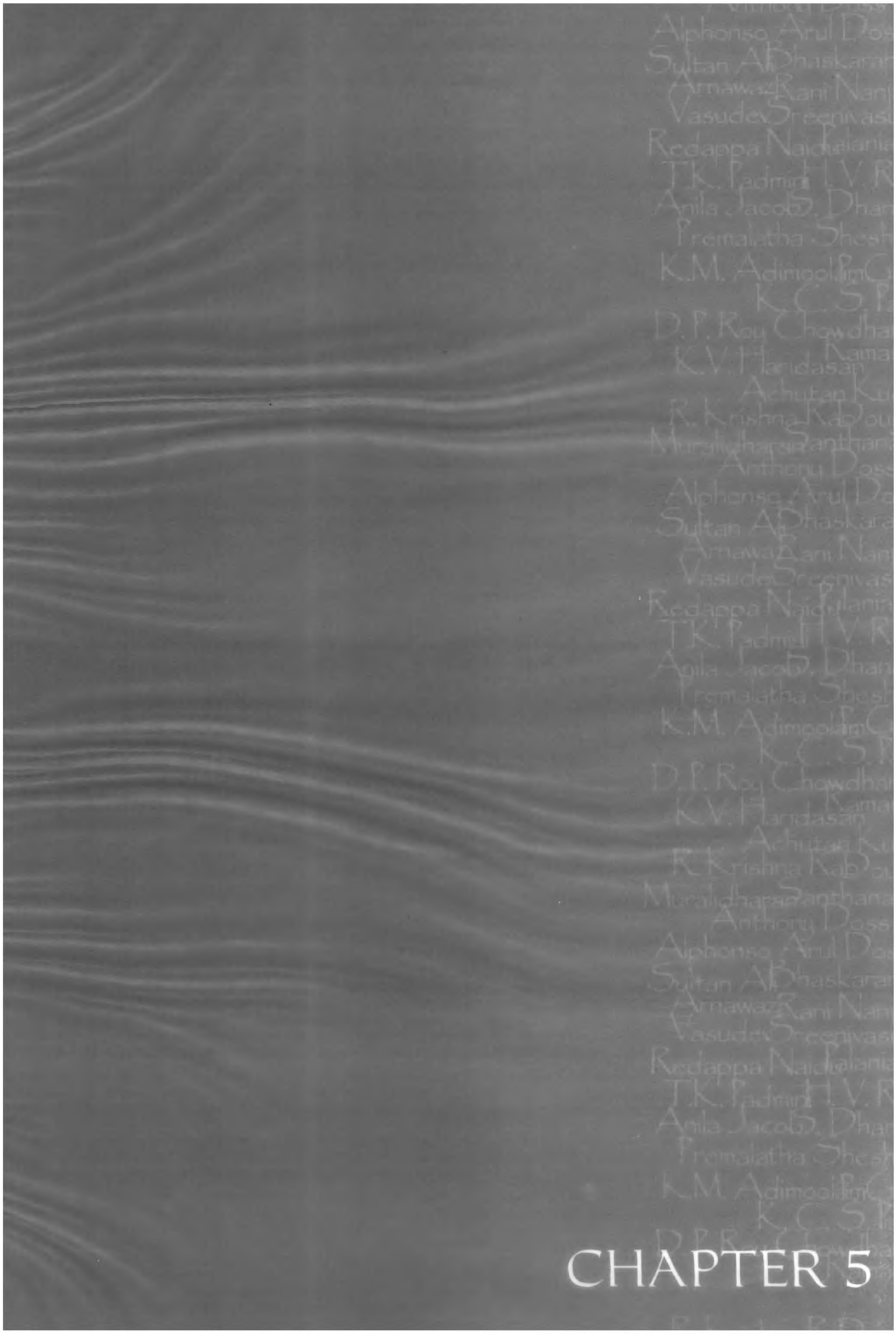

CHAPTER 5

CHAPTER V
HUMAN BODY AS A DOMINANT TROPE: ART IN THE 60S AND 70S

In analyzing the Madras Art Movement a broad categorization of the visual vocabulary employed by the artists' was made as 'abstract' and 'figurative'. The previous chapter detailed the 'type' of abstractions evolved by the artists with their approach grounded in their regional culture i.e. derived partly from canonical pictorial and plastic arts and partly from native folk art traditions and performing arts. The term figurative in this chapter has been employed to significantly reveal the use of the human form/and or its use as metaphor, sign and symbol to become the vehicle for the artists' schema in conveying his expressions.

In Indian traditional/classical culture, the human form has been reserved as a centrality in its varying formations as metaphor, sign and symbol. Its articulation always remained in a state of flux becoming a ubiquitous phenomenon in visual art from sacred to profane to narration in epics and myths. Until the Bombay progressives' negotiations with abstraction, and its subsequent dominance in the modern art scene from the 50s to the 70s, the human form had survived the colonial and the nationalizing discourse on art.

In modern Indian art the significant use of human form in the artists oeuvre was part of a program to represent people from their culture/surroundings and typically utilized the human imagery as an expressive medium. Artists distilled elements from personal experience to create meaningful expressions that made universal statements. Writing for *Vrischik,* Geeta Kapur launched a frontal assault on post-Independence non-figurative art as being part of a conformist international formalism that claimed primacy of style over meaning. Her significantly curated show "Place for People' in 1981 argued and established figurative narratives as a moving force in contemporary Indian art.

Mediated by the artist, the interpretation of the human form served to record and convey his sensations, concepts, emotions, expressions, formal language and meanings[1]. The majority of artists within the Madras Group consciously employed human form to carry the weight of their problematic formal language while indirectly also considered to be a central premise for their exposition. This argument also serves to reinforce the point that while the national modernist largely had gradually evacuated their burden of any reference to the figurative, the Madras based

modernist retained it. The human form thus effectively served to precipitate polyvalent ideas of artists within the Madras Group.

The human figure was a dominant motif for a large number of artists, an engagement that assisted their expressions. The senior most artists amongst the Madras Group in late 50s and early 60s were J. Sultan Ali, K. Sreenivasulu, M. Redappa Naidu, A.P. Santhanaraj Anthony Doss and Alphonso Arul Doss. Of the first three artists Sultan Ali and Sreenivasulu were contemporaries of Paniker while Redappa Naidu was the student of the latter. These three artists are no more while the latter three are active today. In analyzing the figurative compositions of the three artists who are no more, what becomes manifest in their body of works was the dominance of the folk/tribal inspired imagery. From art historical perspective this is an important point of reference through which claims for identity were possible that allowed Madras Art Movement to have visibility on its own terms. Nevertheless regional/local had been discredited within the national modern as too narrow to be authentic. It is under the postmodern rubric that its importance can be rehabilitated.

The decade of 60s as earlier analyzed was seminal in many areas and in the South more so because a major movement was gaining momentum that would have lasting implications for the artists of this region. Towards this study the artists involved in the process consciously used the tribal and folk imagery. This thus necessitates an analysis of the temporal and spatial dimension of these arts in order to situate their oeuvre. In analyzing the works of the three senior artists namely Sultan Ali, Sreenivasulu and Reddappa Naidu, it will allow for a regional reading of their imagery derived from traditional folk art forms. While Sultan Ali and Reddappa Naidu have integrated the script along with their imagery quiet similar to the conventions set by Paniker, but deflected, according to their sensibility, as compositional device. Sreenivasulu's works are purely figurative.

The culture specificity of art retrospecting to pre-modern antecedents was mainly necessitated by the nationalist agenda. But the prevalence of the same in the post independence milieu especially with the Madras Group was the problematic of its marginalisation as well defining contours to configure the regional modern. The artists from this region wanted to be seen different and fully expressed their regional ethos by accommodating in their artistic statements the 'Indianness' within the national milieu. Simultaneously within international mainstream they had to react creatively to the accretion of modernist European/American experiences by sourcing visual ideas

from their cultural traditions to maintain their distinction. Consequently reinventing the art language of tradition and folk arts specifically for this purpose not only provided flexibility for the artists' but also became a measure for negotiating their creative statements. Cultural specificity in this particular instance did not arise from the structured syntactical properties but also had the resonance of emotions and experiences from these cultural products. That is the artists by arbitrating their selection were translating particular emotions and experiences of these varied art forms in their artistic statements.

Epistemological Dimensions of Folk Art

Folk art had been differentiated from 'primitive' art, for the latter was considered a study in its own right. However both the folk and 'primitive' art appear to have visually different character. Basically 'primitive' art was applied specifically to the art of pre literate peoples, whose outside contacts were minimal. 'Primitivism' suggested mining art forms from cultures that displayed primeval qualities in its rituals, worship, dance forms, drama and archetypal iconic images. In other words establishing time/space notions that have remained unchanged. This perspective is in relation to the Western discourse that views its own culture as rational and progressive while the 'primitive' is reflected as unchanging and instinctual. This basically denies the 'coevalness' of the producer of 'primitive art' with its western counterpart. Folk art on the other hand is said to exist within a general cultural sphere, which is at a more advanced stage of development. That is the folk culture permitted flexibility in absorbing features and elements from other art forms and it was open to move along with changing times. The case in point would be Madhubani folk art and the tribal arts of Bastar in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh respectively.

"Folk art is the graphic experiences of the same social temper, background of thought, religion, character and even aspiration that characterized the folklore and the group as a whole. The study of these arts often called as 'regional arts' provided the awareness of folk style. The word folk has a concept, that art is communal as a result of cumulative originality rather than individual creativity"[2]. However in the modern national discourse, the response to folk art had veered between extravagant enthusiasm and a denunciation of it as meaningless repetition, while the other dimension considered, that it was a basic substructure, from which all strong art traditions had arisen and drew its sustenance. K.G. Subramanyan gave a broad definition when he said that, "Folk arts stand for all traditional arts, non-professional and professional, of various degrees of sophistication, all traditions having had their origin in pre-industrial communities of variable size"[3].

The impetus to explore the folk was inbuilt in modernism and in India too the artists recognized the value of this tradition in exploring their modernity. Jamini Roy, the Bengal artist was an initiator in this direction whose primitivism made a consistent ideological statement. In his art he stressed on the simplicity and iconicity of these art forms and helped modern Indian art to charter a new trajectory. Within the nationalist discourse valorization of traditional folk art forms allowed the possibility of marking the Indian specificity making it distinct from the Western modern. Hence influences generated by the indigenous arts of India contributed a particularized strain to modern Indian painting. Within the Madras Art Movement when K.C.S Paniker pushed artists to go to the grass root levels to rejuvenate and formulate new expressions from Dravidian/regional art forms, the anxiety of the artists was to find new ways of seeing and expressing, so that the regional culture could be reinterpreted on their own terms and within a framework that would be both national and regional. This anxiety of influences itself is modern becoming a cornerstone expressed in radical distortion and fragmentation. Interestingly these artists assimilated the new repertoire drawn from the rich traditional sources to enrich their vision and hence their style. It was not blind imitation but by structurally gleaning the visual principles, figures and motifs from folk and tribal art forms it enabled them to impart new strength to their own art, which was irrevocably to inscribe their modern experiences as contemporary expressions.

A positive attraction to the folk art idiom was the implicit simplicity of its forms revealing boldness and clarity. In folk art the playful interaction in the creation of forms and imagery is not an engineered vision rather it is found to be an inherent dimension of the folk artists sensibility. Their strong living shapes and bright colours contributed to vigour and animation not found in more complex and sophisticated arts. Stylization of motifs occurred for purely decorative use/purpose and exaggeration of gestures indicated expressive possibilities. The dominant traits that mark it as salient naïve stylistic features were the large heads, protruding large eyes and the preference for frontality. In addition to this a strong design element manifested their compositions and this inherent factor was largely responsible for their popular appropriation. In this respect an understanding of the structural characteristics of folk art can open up the artist's perspectives on an art language. It can be argued that the modern artists from the Continent especially Paul Klee, Henri Matisse, and Wassily Kandinsky originally were attracted to the folk arts. If Kandinsky discovered it in his own region where essentially the primary colours of rural crafts left an indelible impression upon him, the Egyptian hieroglyphics and Persian miniatures

on the other hand inspired Klee and Matisse respectively. Matisse's decorative vocabulary collapsed such diverse sources as Persian miniatures, Moroccan tapestries and Moorish carpets in flat two-dimensional planarity and decorative patterning. Their exemplary oeuvre set the paradigm for the Indian modern artists who could draw parallels from their own specific region, which in the instance of the Madras Group would be South India

Interest in folk-art and craft forms was initiated in the middle of the 19th century. As early as 1915-16, Rabindranath Tagore expressed great concern for the disappearance of these forms from the cultural scene and stressed the need for their collection and study. In this respect the Tagores became pioneers in the collection of folk art in India at the beginning of the 20th century. Rabindranath Tagore in initiating this study manifested interest in their 'art forms' so that its distinct art language would enrich the sensibility of the artists. The first Indian artist to consciously model his work entirely on folk art was Jamini Roy in 1921. It should be emphasized at this juncture that it was Nandalal Bose who attempted an analyses of the linguistic structures of country's traditional art forms – their techniques, their formal break up, their visual bases. The compulsion to look to an Indian past was linked with the problem of national identity within the nationalist discourse and Jamini Roy defined his terrain here to yoke himself out of anemic stereotyped mannerism of Bengal School. He connected his art to the vocabulary of folk idiom that included the pat paintings; inspiration derived from kantha embroidery and alpana or the floor decorations. Despite the fact that Jamini Roy to a large extent pioneered an innovative venture in this direction, his works has been critiqued as lacking in passion since they privileged decoration over expression largely remaining as mute statements of folk art derivatives. Moreover the criticism was slanted at his inability to move beyond the placid art language that he had derived from the folk arts. Nevertheless he radicalized its spirit with its stress on rural art.

The 1940s and 50s saw the continuation of folk elements incorporated into various personal styles of the artists all over the country. The folk derived art in its most attenuated and highly elaborate form was seen particularly in the oeuvre of Sreenivasulu who could be characterized as the 'Jamini Roy of the South'. While Redappa Naidu's derivative was more iconic in the nature of identifiable deities like 'devi' or 'Ganesha' inspired from wayside shrines of Tamilnadu, Sultan Ali's imagery was particularly inspired from the tribal arts of Bastar in Madhya Pradesh. Sultan Ali's grotesque imagery had precedents in Indian artistic tradition where bestiality and monstrous imagery prevailed within the sanctity of sacred architecture. The *ganas*, *yalis* and other hybrid mythical figures populate temples of Hoysalas in Karnataka as well in other parts of the Southern

region. Authenticity in this respect to Ali's imagery was realized by drawing upon folk in particular and traditional high art in general. Thus regionalism came to be defined at this juncture.

J. SULTAN ALI [1921-1992] A PHILOSOPHIC ARTISTIC JOURNEY

Sultan Ali **[Fig. 1]** though an alumnus of the School of Arts and Crafts Chennai was not present at that moment when debates, arguments and discussions centering on the valorization of regional art forms was seriously meditated by senior teacher-artists and core group of students within the institution. Though opportunity offered itself for study at the J.J. School of Arts in Bombay, Sultan Ali studied at the Madras School of Arts and Crafts and graduated in 1941. Much against his father's wishes he took up the creative profession of painting, which his father felt had no future but a determined and stubborn Sultan Ali found his mentor in his grandmother who encouraged him to leave Bombay and he came away to Madras. It was sheer persistence and his single-minded attitude that led him to seek admission at the School of Arts and Crafts.

It becomes imperative to explain the inclusion of Sultan Ali within the Madras Art Movement. The only commonality with other senior artists was that he was an alumnus of the Madras School of Arts and Crafts and chose to pursue native art forms as frame of reference for his creativity. He had a short teaching stint at the institution after his graduation in 1941 and he left Madras to be at the Rishi Valley School at Madanapalle [Andhra Pradesh] and later took up a permanent assignment as an Exhibition Officer at the Central Lalit Kala Akademi when it was founded in 1954. In 1969 he eventually settled at Cholamandal Artists Village where the presence of artists like Paniker, Ramanujam, Haridasan served as a catalyst veering his creative expressions towards a focused creation of works that juxtaposed and integrated tribal folk imagery and tantric ritualistic signs and symbols. A strong binding thread with the Madras Group was Sultan Ali's exploration of pre-industrial or primitive imagery. The journey had begun at Madanapalle in Andhra Pradesh where he had come into contact with the Sukhali tribals. For researching this particularized idiom he shared a common vision with this group in their collective endeavour to mark their identity. Though Sultan Ali did not have to suffer the pangs of establishing any such norms, his gravitation in this particular direction was dictated by a personal search after he drew a blank with perceptual and academic experimentations.

The study of tribal imagery for Sultan Ali was further advanced, consequent to a study published by Verrier Elwyn in late 40s on the tribals of Madhya Pradesh. This opened up possibilities for

exploring forms that could be creatively engaged for evolving his personalized repertoire. Nevertheless it brought him awareness within tribal art conventions of latent resources that could be negotiated according to his sensibility. Realizing the scope of investigating the tribal and folk vocabulary, Sultan Ali made possible and reinvented the imagery creating in the process a new hybrid iconography. Certain in his understanding of tribal and folk ritualistic philosophy, he deduced the abstract concept of 'energy' radicalizing it in close association with its appropriated imagery and forms. Though he was working at Delhi, the most happening place in almost every sphere of culture, paradoxically his style reached its maturity at the Cholamandal Artists Village where he eventually settled in 1969. His concepts underwent changes morphing to resemble *Tantric* art. The very late 60s had witnessed this new wave of reinvented ritualistic and traditional esoteric Tantric art practice that had gained currency by its self-projection as an indigenous art form. For its appeal it was singularly dependent on the modern sensibility that was largely nourished on abstraction. The Neo-Tantric art movement within the country thus marked this shift in his works; and at Cholamandal village the presence of Haridasan proved to be a catalyst as he was a pioneer of this venture in the South.

The mute point about art language as a form of communication is its flexibility, rooted in the artists sensibility, situated within his cultural milieu. Every individual responds to his level of exposure and affinity to particular type of visual motifs, narration, themes, figurations, compositions, colour orchestrations etc. to make a selective assimilation. And it is this factor, which transcends dry eclecticism. The sensibility of Sultan Ali was moved by the simplicity inherent in the tribal arts and crafts that he was exposed to. Tribal art has a dynamic imagery, a raw immediacy and a naïve spontaneity that captivates the senses and the imagination of any creative individual. Ali's art largely derived from this repertoire, which he translated to make them into contemporary expressions. Any tradition or culture was never stagnant; it always negotiated its space within culture, and became relevant to its needs and times. Hence with changing temporal dimensions, the creative individual negotiates with culture to reconstruct it. Contextualizing Ali in the late 50s and the decade of 60s clarifies his position and the move towards researching folk and tribal motifs and its genre. This was the time when Indian artists were going through an identity crisis to resist a dominant internationalism and establish their cultural autonomy in the post-independence situation

Says Sulatan Ali, "after my academic training, [1941] I was confused because the country was going through the same process and there was the crisis of independence. It affected all artists.

Even eight years after my academic training I was not able to get out of that mould. In 1950 I came upon the works of Verrier Elwyn, the anthropologist who published works of tribal arts and it attracted me because of its spontaneity, and realized that though meant for a ritual, possessed an energy or a force and this force/energy attracted me"[4]. More than identifying with the crisis Ali was actively searching for means and methods of evolving and widening the base of his root vocabulary for an art language that would transcend renderings in pure perceptual reality. Since pure retinal experiences did not offer itself to creative manipulations, a way had to be found to get out of this morass. With Verrier's publication, Ali's art acquired the creative push, which he was searching for within the cultural space.

The Script as Pictorial Organizer

It should be reiterated that Ali searching for an individual expression within a community inspired art arrived at this realization after he had mastered or had become proficient in academic renderings of the material sensuousness of life and objects around him. While living and working in Delhi, Ali had traveled extensively visiting the tribal region of Bastar, as well Bengal and Gujarat. His native state of Gujarat where he had lived for fifteen years was to add another dimension to his paintings. Not only the Gujarati script but also its regional tribal and folk arts **[Fig. 2]** and craft forms dynamically interacted with his personalized imagery adapted from the same region as he wanted the dominance of figurative metaphors. Like Paniker initially his scripts were unreadable lending visual texture to his pictorial surface. **[Fig. 3]** The use of the Gujarati script also activated cultural currents that operated from within the region. These cultural experiences Ali inscribed into his pre-industrial art language rendered vital within an urban culture that enhanced the definition of his cross-cultural regionalism.

Style is an index of individual sensibility, and it becomes an agent of particularization providing distinction from one artist to the other. In the 60s within the group of the Madras modernists Ali's development of his personalized style is an instance of the human form serving as a medium [as it was with other artists within the same group] to evolve creative expressions combining stimuli from a range of cultural traditions. This return of the folk/tribal trope in the post independence milieu, enhanced the possibility for the artist, recruiting his individuated forms that in the nationalist discourse had served to define the Indian ethos.

In Ali's works the tribal inspired imagery was juxtaposed with the calligraphic Gujarati text. This concept initially was an innovative development in Europe of the Art Nouveau and Jugendstil

illustrators, explored with ingenuity by Paniker, mobilizing this idea to have valence with regional characteristics. In the case of Ali the two elements, namely the imagery and the words, interacted permitting a distinguished approach from other artists who had done the same in employing the script. This utilization of a Gujarati script by the artist was neither for cryptic nor graphic purposes rather it served in enhancing the planar dimension of his compositions. Through negotiation with script Ali made distinction of his approach from the employment of the same by Paniker and Redappa Naidu. Here though I draw parallels with these two artists, Paniker's aesthetics of the graphic script was conceptualized operating only at a sensory level not intended for any interpretation or analysis. Redappa Naidu on the other hand scripted the Sanskrit slokas in Davangiri script along with his highly reductive mellifluous imagery in order to be read, thus complementing the visual and the text. In Ali's case his use of words translates as narrative a verbalization of his concepts paraphrased through metaphors in his visual language. The script served as a backdrop enhancing the surface richness while reinforcing his imagery. Synthesizing internal [mental] and external experiences, Ali's works consolidated both; an exercise carried out with versatility and dexterity. **[Fig. 4]**

Sultan Ali initiated his venture in the introduction of the Gujarati script as title to his paintings inscribed within his compositions. The tentative incorporation of the script invaded his canvases in 1966. Initially its use evidenced his lack of confidence, for the script was ephemerally defined in soft and subtle tones. **[Fig. 5]** But as soon as he realized that the complex dimensions of the script were productively synchronizing with the theme, as well as the decorative and metaphysical elements of the painting, these scripted areas on the canvas became larger either in circular or rectangular format. "The forms of the scripts, nevertheless were not strictly represented according to their calligraphic norms but these were planned and structured to suit the requirement. Later in some of the cases, he experimented further by juxtaposing various color hues in the spaces, within and around the script, leading to abstract values, quite away from the main active melodramatic planes, thus introducing two centrifugal and active spaces for perpetual visual focus"[5]. Sultan Ali thus manipulated the abstract character of the forms of script to blend and enhance the pictorial imagery and simultaneously evacuated it of the burden of meaning. In this respect though it fulfilled the aesthetic needs of compositional organization, indirectly the scripts also serviced his ideas becoming the carrier of concepts through words though not defined.

Energy Mediated Through Symbols [1954-1974]

The distinguishing and significant features of Ali's works were the strength of his colours and the totemic anthropomorphic imagery. **[Fig. 6 &Fig. 7]** A draughtsman with an easy facility he could render figurative compositions and other genre effortlessly. D.P. Roy Chowdhary praised his talents and considered him a very innovative colorist with an eye for unusual combinations[6]. His early works were rendered in watercolours and mixed media. From mid fifties he explored the oil medium applying thick impasto paint and finally gave up this mode of technique in favour of smooth application of colours, which softly blended with nuances of shades and tones imparting individual character and richness to the surface of the paintings. These material techniques and manipulations allowed and made it possible to describe his works as source of energy. It was energy, because behind the work of art, beyond the canvas, colour and paint there was a thought. And thought was energy thus defining it as numinous.

Sultan Ali's style reached full maturity in 1969 at Cholamandal Artist Village where he eventually settled to concentrate on painting. His 'Indianness' defined his approach and method. This 'Indianness', which he construed for his art was grounded in Indian philosophy directed towards the 'rasa' concepts[7]. Ali was convinced that European art was cold and formal because of its insistence on rationality and logic with an appeal more to the mind than to the spirit of the human emotions. This cold rationality the artist found unsuitable and resisted it to favour the intuitive Indian philosophical episteme and approach. This philosophical introspection marks a strategy that closely aligns his figural compositions with those of the Fauves and the Expressionists who deployed primitive imagery but for a different purpose and function. The primitive discourse within modernism demonstrates that the appropriation of its imagery was on artists own terms. For individual temperaments, creative forces and urges within the artist facilitated his arbitration of these unsophisticated but potent forms. For many within the modernist arena in Europe, it essentially served to move away from the sophistication of art representation into a field of naiveté and simplicity. But for Sultan Ali these powerful and radical imagery were metaphors for 'energy' that laid the framework for his individual imagination. His primitivism in fact was premised on tribal art and imagery qualifying to be tribal primitivism via *Tantric* philosophy. The latter by no means was related to primitive culture.

The first exhibition of his works that he held at Kumar Gallery in Delhi in 1963 marked his arrival on the Modern Indian art scene. After a period of experimentations Sultan Ali arrived at his style. "Illustration had given way to symbols and the hard outline of his earlier work was

replaced by the fading effect that allowed him to superimpose figures upon figures. The new complexity of structure allowed him to express much more complex meanings than before. The style was not a result of experimentation with form and color but of a ripening of philosophical ideas"[8]. Sultan Ali's deepening awareness of anthropological episteme of tribal life and art qualified in combining philosophical concepts and metaphors and symbols in his works. The painting method and technique aided in reinforcing his evolved concepts. The semantic of his art was revealed through means direct and indirect, that is employing symbols and human forms that were delineated frontally and distorted. **[Fig. 8]**

It is a ubiquitous phenomenon in the tribal and folk arts that symbols were largely employed for rituals. He retrenched them from a ritualistic matrix and transposed them as metaphors on his canvas. In this respect the forms of the bull **[Fig. 9]** and snake predominate to symbolize primeval fecundity and energy. **[Fig. 10]** The strength of the bull and the mesmerizing character of the snake were juxtaposed with equal ferociousness and demonic human imagery. In bringing alive these forms on his canvases Ali was invading the territory of expressionists. His deep felt responses to life were made vivid through the frightening human and animal forms and communicated forcefully. The large bulging and protruding eyes and the expressions of the mouth convey uninhibited emotions in human or the animal forms. He does not stray into the territory of sophistication but makes his canvases a battle field where the imagery either human or demonic are locked in a fury that obliquely translate as triumph of good over evil. Ali rendered them in a bold and aggressive manner.

Sultan Ali, in addition also sourced his imagery from dreams and visions. Appropriately his works manifested a strong surreal character. The powerful symbols he developed advanced his ideology based on energy. In this respect the various animals worshipped in the animistic tribal culture particularly the bull and snake though having different connotations projected essentially this concept. His most striking creations were frontally treated like primitive masks. His faces concentrate on the unbeautiful and raw emotions as Ali had jettisoned naturalism completely. With symbols as content for his expression he worked on it for another decade refining on them. He developed a broad canvas of values in life – its perils and trivialities, joys and fears, anxieties and hopes translating through his pictorial vocabulary that had a wide appeal. ***Drushshta Kala*** [1967][**Fig. 11.**] had the vital powerful bull as a dominant imagery rendered in a technique of impasto that enhanced the energy collapsing the technique, ideology and the power of nature metaphorically into one. This metonymy of referencing the animal to energy cohabit his pictures.

Juxtaposed with it was the Gujarati script though it remained subtly nuanced without interfering with the rest of the schema. ***Rasa Sangthan*** [1967] **[Refer Fig. 10]** and ***Adivasi Bhumimata*** [1967] **[[Refer Fig. 5]** employ the motif of the snake interestingly. In the former the snake occupies the top register of the painting like a dragon of the underworld spewing forth fire; and the tribals below both males and females seem to be appeasing to this great energy as indicated by their submitting attitudes and postures. The latter painting depicted the female form subsumed within the contours of the snake with a bold inscription at the bottom of the picture that provides its identification.

These works of Sultan Ali assumes a posture of introspection as he mediated through this tribal imagery to reflect upon the philosophy of existence. For him the process of painting/creation was equivalent to meditation. And through the process of meditation, which essentially for him was the physical act of creation, it allowed continued existence or confronting life with all its diverse aspects smooth and acceptable. That is, he purged angst and tensions through the construction of his pictures. When he confronted the canvas there was no premeditated imagery or schema and after a chaotic struggle he would enter into the state of total introspection and the forms and colours spontaneously would begin to take energy and in a spirit of total bliss or *ananda* he would continue till the composition was finished[9]. This was purely an intuitive act to which Sultan Ali had no explanation to offer. And this explained his oft-quoted aphorism "Painting is *ananda* or bliss".

His imagery undoubtedly has the power to engage one's attention, as it appeared grotesque and confrontational, but subsumed within it was the serene personality of the artist that comes through with great force. Apparently this has a paradoxical ring because there is also an inherent polarity subsumed within this confession. According to Ali it is a livable imagery and not formidable since his works manifest philosophical values and express emotions not of fear but of bliss or *ananda.* Sultan Ali clarifies, "These paintings are a personification of one's inner self, one's identity, and one's personality is definitely reflected in the pictures"[10]. The conflict that is obliquely expressed in these pictures particularly the pre-occupation with good and evil was like the duality that is manifested in Christian imagery namely heaven and hell, virtue and vice, good and bad.

Sultan Ali clarified the abstraction of thought prevailing in his works through his technique, which essentially explored the elements of line, space and color. His technique manifestly

employed superimposition of transparent forms or emerged from within each other creating an illusion of reading the images as subtexts. Privileging ideas through forms; the space reduced to two dimensionality replacing the tyranny of illusion, and symbols and imagery sourced from tribal and primitive arts coalesce in Ali's compositions to impact on the sensibilities of the viewer. The compositional structure is organic conveying the feel of constancy of emergent forms. Colours had definitive tones merged artistically to complement the imagery and at the same time evoked area of space to the qualification of his requirement. Ali's paintings in many ways were highly subjective and expressionistic for the simple reason that he emoted through his works. Though the vision was naive what made it exemplary was the projection of his dynamically developed form and content. In this respect his method and schema of representation was in many ways a calculated departure from Sreenivasulu, Paniker or Redappa Naidu. All images were interdependent; one modified the other in their impact. His pictures could be read as a mass of detail, but essentially Sultan Ali achieved a direct impact, a single mood through these technical processes, which he had labeled as "pictorial unification". **[Fig. 12]** Sultan Ali in his method of working was very systematic going from stage to stage and this clearly informed his oeuvre. As he said, "creative work should grow methodically. The mind has to be extremely clear – one phase should give direction to the next. There is no short cut"[11] Consequently around 1974, Ali, gradually drained all imagery out of his space and instead replaced it with an abstract concept of '*yoni*', which again was a metaphor for the energy, or of life itself **[Figs.13 & 14]** Along with the imagery even the colours drained out and his palette consisted entirely of blacks and greys and gradually added sepia and earth colours. Then he made it into monochromes of greens and blues rendering his compositions extensively in this palette. This marked the final phase in his progressive growth that lasted until his death in 1992. This leaning towards Tantric expression came naturally to Sultan Ali for at Cholamandal, Haridasan was already working in this idiom and artist in other parts of the country were doing the same.

The imagery of Sultan Ali was a consequence of his studied efforts in tribal art forms. And he imbued his imagery with *rasa,* the potential of aesthetic experience, particularly those of '*Bhayanak*' or fearsome and '*Vir*' or the heroic emotions. The valorization of tribal art forms was further reinforced by the deployment of these *bhavas* or emotions presenting objective correlatives of emotional experiences. Indigenism therefore inscribed his art when he consciously channalized dimensions of Indian aesthetics to powerfully become visual metaphors. They were his visual statements, which by constant deployment had become synonymous with

his personality. As a matter of fact his imagery also makes interesting analysis bordering as it does on the subconscious and expressionistically savaged to make its potency felt. [**Fig. 15**]

K. SREENIVASULU [1923-1995] CONFLATION OF NATIVE SENSIBILITY WITH MODERN APPROACH

The place of Sreenivasulu **[Fig. 16]** within the Madras Art Movement is paradoxical. He was an artist who was a peer of Paniker when they graduated in 1941 and both went their separate ways. Sreenivasulu came from a rural background and his childhood was spent at Nagalapuram in the Chitoor district. It was this artist who consciously adopted the regional folk idiom despite being academically trained and exposed to western art and modernist formulae. He was already on a path that Paniker after a tremendous struggle would lead the group of artists, while Sreenivasulu self-consciously had adopted this mode of expression without external stimuli or exhortation to introspect on tradition. Within the discourse on Madras Art Movement Sreenivasulu is a pioneer along with Paniker and holds an important place. Though Paniker and Sreenivasulu's trajectory were parallel within the teaching profession, the latter teaching at the Beasant School, Adyar, while Paniker's career was roped to the Art Institution of which he eventually became its head.

Paniker, consequent to criticism, was forced by the exigencies of the time to route his creativity through its culture and tradition. It should be noted that Sreenivasulu came under scathing criticism for working in a mode and style that bore strong allegience to the representational language of Jamini Roy. While Jamini Roy on the other hand had to take the flak and stand up to the criticism of the innovative approach and techniques of his contemporary Nandalal Bose. The latter in order to give a broader dimension to the interaction between art and politics had related his interest in traditional themes and techniques by contextualising within the nationalist discourse. Jamini Roy in comparison eventually paled into insignificance because he was seen more as local and primeval who could not take his art beyond a point of experimentation with the terminology of folk tradition and elements. Sreenivasulu was also criticized on the same grounds but the regional sensibility of both the artists was at polarity. If Jamini Roy's oeuvre is characterized by stern pragmatic lines and terse compositions calculated for transmitting primeval power to resist mannered sentimentalism of the Bengal School, Sreenivasulu's expressions contradicts almost all the aspects except the persistent descriptive line. Ingeniously Sreenivasulu had juxtaposed a study of Jain Miniature tradition with Jamini Roy's iconography. And gradually amalgamated both these influences with Lepakshi mural style folk patterning, sartorial attire, human forms, two-dimensional decorative space and the effulgence of its coloured calibration.

Though the resemblance between the works of the two artists is striking there were marked differences deflecting strong regional sensibility because of their response to different local cultural idioms.

Confiuration of Sreenivasulu's Style

Sreenivasulu's experiences were rooted in the rural life amidst which he had spent the momentous twelve years of his childhood and adolescent years before running away to Madras from his village of Nagalapuram in Andhra Pradesh. His strong artistic predilection could be traced to his family. His father was an efficient and a deft clay modeler fashioning toys, while his great grand parents had owned a theatre for local performances. Confessed Sreenivasulu, "my love for art was kindled and aroused amidst these surroundings. As a child my mind was focused on art and the hereditary artistic instincts in me were awakened"[12]. The folk crafts of his region especially the Kondapalli and Thirupati wooden toys fascinated him equally. In school he showed scant interest and was passionately inclined towards learning the craft processes. When parental pressures increased to perform well academically, he ran away from home and came to Madras. In Madras he found a mentor in a doctor who hired him to do menial jobs. The doctor who was an enthusiast of dance and music noticed the drawing skills of that Sreenivasulu possessed and decided to enter him in the Madras School of Arts and Crafts, from where he graduated eventually with a Diploma in Fine Arts in 1941.

Soon after his graduation Sreenivasulu had an opportunity to take up teaching assignment at the Beasant School, Adyar. This was fortuitious for him as Adyar was a seat of Theosophical Society, the Beasant School and Kalakshetra, where the revival and resuscitation of Indian fine arts such as dance, music and painting was taking place. Art enjoyed maximum privilege within its precincts and the days Sreenivasulu spent there were most productive shaping his influences and the perceptions that later reflected in his works.

While his pedagogy at the Art Institution was foregrounded in academic realism, which did not permit space for study of regional art forms and mythology; at Adyar, dance and music pervaded the atmosphere and brought back childhood memories particularly folklore and myths. The significant aspect at the Kalakshetra was that apart from classical dance and music it also provided a platform for folk-dance, drama and decoration. It was also at this campus that an awareness of contemporary Indian art scene was made manifest through lectures by G.H. Cousins, an eminent art critic. These early experiences of working at Adyar offered opportunities

for Sreenivasulu to reflect about India's art historical traditions, which opened up possibilities of making it central in his artistic creations.

Significantly an awareness of Indian traditional arts enlarged his perception mandating overthrow of European academicism and Bengali wash technique and suggesting opportunities for developing his personal statements that would have authenticity of an Indian ethos. For Sreenivasulu this meant consciously gravitating towards the folk art of his village to give physical form to his vision. "We have inherited our culture, knowledge and all our basic experiences from the past. It is only fitting that we honour and respect our past achievements. They are invalueable treasures"[13] comments Sreenivasulu. The tremendous insight of sourcing from cultural topography of his region, led Sreenivasulu to meaningfully engaged with regional folk art and craft forms to shape his linguistic nuances. It became possible for Sreenivasulu to interface his creative ideas through the visual language of folk arts and crafts to render his responses to everyday experiences. He professed faith that "true function of art is to provide a naked comment on the contemporary scene without any sentimentality". This notion of the artist grounds him in the modernist tradition but subverting it to effect a shift to cultural identity within his milieu.

The period of mid 40's proved most opportune for Sreenivasulu since it offered timely intervention to study original collection of Jain Miniatures of Western India as well the paintings of Jamini Roy. The structural formulations of Jain Miniatures with their characteristic hierarchal placement of figures, the projecting eye in profile, the two-dimensional space, chromatic contrasts together with the ubiquitous rhythmic flowing line morphing as patterned designs proved to be a catalyst which Sreenivasulu seized upon. Jamini Roy too made an impact on him with his simplicity of design and boldness of composition. Sreenivasulu admits to Jamini Roy's influence on him when he commented, "I deeply admire him and accept him as the pioneer of modern folk art, whose pursuit of folk culture had become the starting point of a new primitivism in Modern Indian painting"[14].

His paintings in mid 1940's inspired by folk toys, the cultural ambience of Adyar and Jamini Roy were **New Bangles, [Fig. 17] Toy-Seller, [Fig. 18] and Rocky Horse Toy Seller [Fig. 19]** and **The Card Players [Fig. 20].** These paintings revealed his affinity for local culture and tradition creating a framework , in which the element of line and value tones would predominate. Line as a tool was personalized by him through which he created a large of body of works that today makes a significant contribution towards the Madras Art Movement. He exhibited his sound

academic training when he adopted Western Indian miniature tradition with its inherent folk art elements of simplicity, distortion and expressions, to translate as his personal idiom. In all of the above-mentioned works he had ingenuously crowded his compositions on a flat plane with faces in sharp profiles, elongated eyes, an aquiline nose and a triangular torso. **[Fig. 21]** The resemblance of the figures to Egyptian conventions of rendering in profile and frontal position is striking. In this respect Sreenivasulu's experiments with imagery was in the modernist convention suitably organized to integrate with regional idiom.

These compositions of Sreenivasulu were invested with energy akin to Sultan Ali, as his forms were not static but interactive creating vibrancy within his compositions. Interestingly it was his delineation of the toy sellers in all the three mentioned works that captures one's attention. It is the hieratic representation of the toy seller in the painting **The Toy Seller [Refer Fig 18]** as he sits with his folded legs aligned in a straight line with his back in front view and face in profile that interestingly clarifies his consciously developed vocabulary. This type of perspective in the human figure was a salient characteristic of Sreenivasulu's compositions – a formulation and design that he evolved after repeated expressions. In addition his works have strong patterning, decorative designs and minute details that reflects his absorption of these elements from the particular tradition that was the substratum of urban life [the folk art]. His choice of colours were of the earth mainly the Indian reds and yellow ochres strengthened with black outlines. An interesting dimension of his work was that they exuded an organic quality since curves predominated to heighten this effect. The positioning of the hands and feet in his paintings manifested subconsciously the dance performances held at Adyar as demonstrated in the painting **Bird Toy Seller [Fig. 22]**

Sreenivasulu's figurative style was configured through selection of elements from puppets, toys motifs from Kalamkari textiles and from the physiognymy of the tribals'of his region namely the Sukhalis of Rayalaseema and the Lambadis of Madanapalli. His figures were arranged with calculated geometric precision. His motifs – animals, ordinary fisher folks, gods and goddesses were common to village art. His firm outlines took on an additional excitement becoming statuesque in some of his swift sketches of dancers and animals. **[Figs. 23 & 24]** For Sreenivasulu as with the others of the Madras Group, the new form of modern western art met a revived Indian tradition generating a whole new vocabulary of massive resources upon which to draw. He is also more like a 'cross over' artist, being traditional/modern in his form and technique. This brings into question other artist within the Madras Group who had also employed

the folk metaphor. But Sreenivasulu's sensibility and experiences were predominantly anchored in his native traditionsrural and despite living and working in a metropolis his iconography was the nostalgia for his village in Andhra Pradesh. To this he meldes his contemporary sensibility to an Indian subject matter with a modernist detachment.

An Encounter with Tradition

As a student Sreenivasulu's exposure to Indian art tradition was negligible or none at all. This awareness came to him after he took up the teaching assignment at Adyar. But more important was his appointment in late 40s to copy frescoes at various temples in South India as well as in Sri Lanka [the Sigiriya frescoes]. Commissioned by the Madras Museum, a government agency, this assignment took him all over the South, sensitizing him to canonical traditions both in painting and sculpture. But the most noteworthy work was assigned to him in early 1950s when he was asked to copy the murals of the Veerabhadra temple at Lepakshi[15] situated in the Hindupur Taluk, Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh. This was a Sixteenth Century Vijaynagar temple a locus for pilgrimage as equally for culture and commerce. Sreenivasulu made five hundred panels of paintings from the ceiling of the mandapas of this temple. In the process of translating these paintings to drawings, certain stylistic features particularly the sensuous female form, the rich dark colours, patterned designs in sarees and the sharp local features overwhelmed his sensibilities. And it was no surprise that these features invaded his works, which he synthesized with fluid line.

An encounter of this nature made Sreenivasulu introspect on further exploring the rationale behind Indian pictorial tradition towards which he was drawn and realizing the versatility inherent within it opened up varied possibilities in his own art for assimilating its style and spatial character. This engagement with the pictorial tradition particularly the murals enabled him to arrogate the linear imagery, the decorative patterning and the decorative space. His vision became broad based whereby he juxtaposed and amalgamated the Lepakshi vocabulary with Jain miniatures and evolved expressions to suit his contingency. A simple vision and naive expressions characterized his works translated through cultural grids namely the Lepakshi experience, the Thanjavur and Sigiriya frescoes, the primitive vocabulary in Jain miniatures and the immediate precedent of the works of Jamini Roy. It was this spirit of calculated adventurism where the representation of the truth was his ideology that he was immensely successfully with his experiments.

A striking facet of Sreenivasulu's expressions influenced by Lepakshi murals with its attenuated female form was the integration of the Renaissance apparatus of perspective in his frames producing effects of aerial perspective as in **Decoration of Bride [Fig. 25], Mother and Child [Fig. 26]** and **Sawing wood [Fig. 27]** or of foreshortening as in or a one-point perspective as in **Coconut Sellers [Fig. 28]** His genius effectively combined and assimilated the Western art perspective with indigenised forms. The formulations of his highly personalized compositions had quality of insistent movement and not static or rigid as with Jamini Roy. In addition, Sreenivasulu put to aesthetic service the thick line as an all-pervading element to provide a connecting link to his well-knit compositions. He further reinforced his line along its contours with shading reminiscent of Ajanta murals to enhance its value and add richness. This imparted a quality of warmth and earthiness. As mentioned earlier Sreenivasulu did not have to excavate myths and histories to arrive at his subject matter the traditional motifs and myths were read into his contemporary visual experiences. With these paintings Sreenivasulu established his eminence in 50s and was heading in the direction that would allow him to make significant contribution within the Madras Art Movement.

New Experiments: The Decade of 60s

Sreenivasulu's peferred medium had been watercolours, tempera and oils. He worked with all these media to develop his style and vocabulary that largely was folk derivative or genre of his village life. By the end of 50s, Sreenivasulu was in a mood to explore, experiment and invent, which he accomplished in the decade of 60s.

A versatility of the artist is his ability for continuous experiments or otherwise his works reach a stasis and results in stereotypical formulae or become anemic mannered statements. But Sreenivasulu's mindset and his creative restlessness would not allow this complacency. By 60s he once again was on an exploratory tract, achieving no further advance in his figurative stylization, but experimenting with different media. Realizing that the possibilities of media and technique are objectively predetermined and responds to individual will, he decided to focus on medium and techniques; his experimentations privileging innovation over skill. He moved on from watercolours and oils extensively employed earlier and ventured to experiment in mixed media that is crayons with watercolours. The results were dynamically different from his earlier works. He realized that the mixed media permitted a broader formal arrangement and the decorative details, which significantly had marked his earlier works, were minimized. A new imagery now marked his personal idiom. These works continued his engagement with folk arts

and craft forms sharing a kindred spirit with contemporary aspirations for looking into indigenous sources.

The mediation with versatility of mixed media technique produced results that were vastly different from what he had been attempting earlier. It is interesting at this juncture to point out that while Sreenivasulu was becoming restless and wanted a different trajectory, the same restlessness was evident with Paniker in the Madras School of Arts and Crafts. In exhorting his students to reconfigure tradition and interpret it with a modern sensibility, Paniker was also strongly advising them to abandon the traditional medium of water colours and experiment with different techniques that eventually would bring them into mainstream art. Consequently Paniker, Santhanaraj, Munuswamy, Alphonso were inventiong and experimenting using varied supports like aluminium, hardboard, cardboard and techniques like encaustic and mixed media. Sreenivasulu though not directly involved with the institution felt the need to change direction and hence attempted to experiment with varied media.

The Artistic Process

Sreenivasulu, when he painted, made no preliminary drawings or sketches working directly on the support especially the white plain sheet where he made a sketch with black crayon. The depth in his works was achieved primarily by the use of black significantly becoming the main player in his compositions. The black outlines were thick almost to about quarter of an inch. This was followed by filling the colours and gave the finishing touch with black watercolour wash over the whole. When the wash dried, a texture was created and he furthur reinforced this by scratching it with a blade.**[Fig. 29]**

Sreenivasulu despite experimenting with mixed media made no attempts to change his iconography [subject matter] and continued to portray the life of the village **[Fig. 30]** and its routine daily chores and activities. Most important however the change of medium was paralleled by an enhanced change of imagery. **[Figs. 31, 32 & 33]** The structured composition had registers of colored planes built up with crayon washes that simultaneously added textures to augment the whole. The eyes lost their poetic oval shape and assumed a geometric dimension. The colours were brighter and striking in their chromatic brightness. The imagery transformed to suit the new medium losing its lyrical quality and from poetic it became prosaic. The composition exuded heaviness and primeval archaic look dominated the painted expressions. Since for Sreenivasulu human figure provided the medium, it was difficult for him to make any

further reduction in his forms though they were clearly reduced to diagrammatic simplicity. As a matter of fact these works of the 60s apparently were abstract statements for he had drained all extraneous details and decorative patterning to concentrate and emphasize on the forms. Comments S.A. Krishnan, "there is something primeval, archaic in the figuration, and a kind of stoicism and vitality exudes from these crude stalwart men and women. The exaggerated, angular eyes and the big head on the stout neck appear significant and symbolic of a new understanding of the nature of man"[16].

By 70s Sreenivasulu had moved on to another medium namely metal. While walking through the crowded street in Triplicane in Chennai he came upon shops selling copper sheets with scripts written on it and it caught his fancy. Beginning his experimentations with aluminum foil he found the final results disastrous until an engineer advised Sreenivasulu while he was working as an Information-Officer at Guindy to use thicker metal to get the desired results. Sreenivasulu initially used the head of nail to create an impression later extending this use by creating texture on the metal using different sized nail heads. The application of colours on the metal proved another hurdle as it would not adhere to it. He tried different methods, until finally in total dejection he applied a black coat of paint and left it. After about twenty-four hours of application Sreenivasulu decided to wash off the black as it had created a dull and a depressing tone. On the washed metal sheet he applied a fresh coat of paint. To his great surprise on the same metal sheet, the colours instead of stubbornly dripping of adhered. The residual black tone served as tooth to which the pigments held. Hence Sreenivasulu after much diligence and frustrating attempts evolved a method of working in metal that today by its excessive commercial exploitation has lost its aura in the sense of its original approach to metal painting as initiated by Sreenivasulu.

Sreenivasulu's urge to experiment reflected a restless mind and his desires to keep his art within mainstream contemporary milieu. According to the artist, "I have a long way to go and my creativity will end only with my death. Till then my aim is to experiment and search for new ways of expression"[17]. He had acquired mastery over different materials and techniques through constant experiments. He had mediated his imagery and forms through traditional and contemporary media consisting of *Kalamkari*, terracotta, stencils, bricks, concrete, and iron. These materials were compatible to his aesthetic needs and he was comfortable in handling them. In his words, "All appropriate techniques I shall learn, for these are to be employed for the good of my work, I shall be careful however, to avoid the traps of mere adroitness or dexterity. To

create paintings, pigments and paper alone are not enough, one needs to expend blood and sweat"[18].

A Critique of his Style

Sreenivasulu had been scathingly criticized for his mannered and stereotypical style, exhibiting no originality, and that he had exclusively had formulated his expressions, imagery and iconography on the Bengal painter Jamini Roy. In relating his style to plain folk inspiration his critics failed to observe the deeper implications of his works within the milieu of the Madras Art Movement. Paniker after he had transgressed to create his quasi-abstractions based on the Words and Symbols continued working in the same formula till his death. Redappa Naidu after evolving his lyrical poetic and mellifluous line hardly digressed to experiment with any other mode or medium. Munuswamy continues to paint the same mannered abstractions but they are largely broad based and have eschewed the subject matter completely. Santhanaraj who found fulfillment in experimenting with different medias today is in the same fold.. What I wish to point out by making these comparisons is that Sreenivasulu was singled out for pointed criticism primarily because his idiom was folk based and that it was a constant reminder of the employment of this style in the national discourse? There can be no denying that he extensively used the archaic and unsophisticated expression of village community crafts, rendered in the fashion known to them for ages, and did not divert from it in all his different media. And this approach may cast him in a revivalist mode. But it is this very notion of renegotiating the regional arts and crafts under the revised authenticity of regionalism/indigenism and modernity that Sreenivasulu's place is validated. Sreenivasuslu achieved a personalized expression by craftily deploying the structured principles of wooden toys of Kondapalli and Thirupathi with thick, sturdy necks to become the mainstay of his art **[Fig. 34 Mother and Child, 1952].** Another strategic work with the same pointer is **[Refer Fig. 24,Fisher Women 1958]** that largely reflect the refinement of his style using the iconography of the toys as models for his figures.

But a deeper analysis of his oeuvre situates him in the modernist tradition when Sreenivasulu resisted the pure formal quality and prioritized the irreducibility of the medium subverting it for cultural authenticity and notions. From International perspective and a Third World consciousness his oeuvre categorically is culture specific confined to the Southern Indian region with the dominance of tradition in its imagery, colours, iconography and formal means much to the interest of American Imperialist who as a capitalist market dictated the popularity and salability of this genre particularly in late 80s. Nexus with market forces enabled an engagement

with this type of theme productively; but what is vitally significant is Sreenivasulu's mindset, that prevented monetary gains dictating his individuated expressions.

In the spirit of a true artist he held his forte and continued working in the same idiom. He reinforced this when he said, "I must confess that my work has limitation. My delineation of the human figure is deliberately exaggerated and idealistic, but please note, not at all contrived or copied. It comes out of my own free choice. The treatment of the female figure is idealized, stretched to the point of being a mere replica in our ancient and medieval murals, sort of rigidly traditional. So what? What's wrong with tradition? I don't care for critics. They must say something clever and nobody is stopping them"[19].

A.S. Raman became a mediator in bringing the works of Sreenivasulu to a larger public. According to him, "I can modestly claim to have really discovered Sreenivasulu, at least in the context of what had been happening in India and other countries at the time of their Lepakshi mural copies came to my notice in the early 50's. I liked his genuinely folk idiom rooted in the Andhra soil that I decided to project him on the art scene, not only at the national but at the international level too. I started writing about him for the Studio, World Review, both London based, as well as for leading national papers ..... I liked the freshness and the intensity of his approach to the problem of folk ethos in relation to modern idiom, first raised by Jamini Roy.... in fact, in contrast I found Jamini Roy embarrassingly derivative. At once I decided for his rightful place on the national mainstream."[20]. A.S. Raman reacted to Srinivasulu's oeuvre in a tradition that was typical of the decade, when it was becoming imperative that Indian 'identity and authenticity' had to be made visible within the context of internationalism. The author's reaction to this artist in relation to Jamini Roy who had pioneered such an effort on the national scene to give a different trajectory to modern Indian art becomes important now especially in the mid 50's by providing a platform for Sreenivasulu's indigenous and regionalized character of his creations. In the works of this artist, Raman indicted them as having 'vitality' implicating freshness of ideas and approach when compared with Jamini Roy whose works he derided as 'derivative'. On the strength of this he considered it his responsibility to project him internationally to underline the contribution Indian artists' were making towards the progress of modern Indian art in the postcolonial/post independence period. Also Raman indicted him on the national scene particularly in Bombay where he was the editor of Illustrated Weekly of India to clarify the position of a Southern artist who had been ignored or marginalized since Sreenivasulu was reworking his modern idiom through the formal language of the recently discovered

Lepakshi murals [early 1950's] and contemptuously labeled as 'derivative' and 'cliched' by critics and authors in Bombay and Delhi. **[Fig. 35]**

M. REDAPPA NAIDU [1932-1999] CULTURAL POLITICS AND MODERNITY

Redappa Naidu's **[Fig. 36]** art was born out of restlessness with his inquiry based on tradition and its productive adaptation and reinterpretation within the modern paradigm. This ambivalence of tradition and modernity was crucial for him since his roots were within a culture that had one of the longest civilizations. In this respect his sensibility, personal vision, conscious imagery and inner search distinguished his art within nation's mainstream. His place within the Madras Art Movement is influential to the same degree as Paniker's was with his contribution of the Words and Symbols Series. The 60s witnessed a phenomenon of indigenism all over the country when a new consciousness directed the art to derive from its own culture with an attitude of confrontation. This resulted in adding another dimension to the national modern art.

Coming from a scholarly stock and with a romantic bent of mind, his youthful ambition had been to join the celluloid world but the dream remained unfulfilled. Joining the Madras School of Arts and Crafts in 1955, he went through pedagogy under D.P. Roy Chowdhary, S. Dhanapal, K.C.S. Paniker and H.V. Ram Gopal. The first year at the institution was disappointing, since exercises and studies were focused on developing skills through human models or still life that formed an important aspect of the curriculum. Redappa used to memory drawings, was confronted with serious doubts if this would provide opportunities for self-expression. These doubts were partially conditioned by his inability to draw directly from a given model. It was Dhanapal who noticed the restlessness within Redappa and advised him to make direct life studies either from nature or human activities around him. This proved to be a challenge and simultaneously allowed freedom from stuffy studio studies.

A notable feature of the art institution was its relaxed attitude allowing freedom in free exploration coupled with teachers who were equally flexible, allowing that space for students to negotiate his individual studies and approaches. There was no rigid curriculum to be doggedly pursued allowing both the teachers and students an autonomy that proved beneficial as it did with Redappa Naidu. Consequent to this freedom Redappa Naidu delighted in rendering the daily activities at market place, by the sea side, the street children involved in their various games like spinning tops, **[Fig. 37]** carom playing, entertainment as street musicians **[Fig. 38]** cockfight or women at the water tap jostling each other. He rendered these with an impressionist's feel

capturing the spirit of the moment. With the result his works appeared sketchy and unfinished rendered spontaneously in palette knife or with broad strokes. These subjects became his mainstay suggesting singular means to render multidimensionality of human life its placidity and drama, vigour and lethargy, spontaneity and deliberateness, unlimited opportunities for free exploration to hone and develop his skills. These life studies rendered in a spirited manner attracted the attention of Paniker who was fascinated by Redappa's dynamic personal vision.

Realizing the potential of young Redappa he was made a member of the Progressive Painters Association by Paniker and exhibited his works at their show in November 1956. On the basis of his drawing skills and an authoritative vision Redappa was double promoted from his Second year to the Fourth. With Paniker taking keen interest in his works Redappa Naidu's confidence was considerably enhanced. Moreover he was able to sell his works while still a student patronized essentially by American officials of the U.S.I.S. [United States Information Service]. What set him apart from many of his peers at this time was that his works were regularly selected for exhibitions organized either by the School or Government agencies and simultaneously was able to sell them.

The early decades of 60s offered opportunities to Redappa Naidu to study the style and expressions of the various canonical traditional forms of Indian Art including Ajanta and Ellora, Thanjavur paintings and the Mughal miniatures. In this seminal occupation he encountered line that was to define the basis of his art. This exposure was profound as he studied the versatile line serving diverse needs from expression to decoration, poetic to prosaic, narrative to symbolic. Line, however, has remained a ubiquitous phenomenon not only in India but also in the pictorial traditions of many ancient civilizations from Egypt to China to Persia, eloquently expressing through minimum means the maximum results. It was the valourization of line by the modernists like Klee, Kandinsky, Miro et al that led to a new appraisal of traditional Indian art. As Jaya Appasamy comments on the line, "line is a mean, an instrument, a language and invests form with reality defining it and giving it existence. All forms of Indian Art have drawing as their basis"[21]. Hence the resourceful line became a tool for intellectualization with Redappa Naidu. Moreover the rediscovery of line was not so much a return to Indianness but a return to the native tongue. Reinforcing this dimension was Paniker's experiments in early 60s realized in his Words and Symbols Series. Drawing now became the bastion of his art and eventually he mapped his inherent classical pictorial tradition on to his contemporary expressions.

This was a period [early 60s] of intense research not only for Naidu but also for Paniker heading the Institution to explore new possibilities for the problematic identity within the North South divide, exploration of regional modern within the national consciousness and to counter Internationalism with its hegemonic agenda [abstraction and particularly Abstract Expressionism] and at the same time to remain within the modernist mainstream by their contemporary statements. It was during this time that Redappa came under the spell of Cubism, particularly of the Paris School, that was gaining popularity since its basic essence was to fracture reality and move away from the tyranny of illusion/third dimension. The shifting geometric planes and the conceptual viewpoint attracted Naidu since it negates optical truth leading primarily to create a concept in design and patterning.

To translate his vision through the language of cubism he turned towards the subject of church architecture that allowed him to reduce the mass of forms to cubist planes and linear drawings. He understood the elementary axiom of Cézanne that truth lay in its basic essence or shapes. Towards this end, he studied the geometric aspects of architecture that could be effortlessly translated to reductive formulas and in the process was captivated by the inverted cone of the tower, the rectangular body of the building, the arches, doors the tall pinnacles and other shapes as they manifested in the architectural composition. Redappa's choice of architectural themes that included the colonial monument along Marina Beach front **[Fig. 39]** and particularly churches; went parallel with cubism in its western genealogy. He painted St. Thomas Cathedral **[Fig. 40]** and the St. Georges Cathedral **[Fig. 41]** the two landmarks in Chennai. In both these works he laid emphasis on the soaring tower. The other architectural elements were rendered distinctly with a few sketchy brush strokes loaded with grey color. A striking feature of these architectural studies were that Redappa Naidu besides reducing the monumentality of these structures to simplicity of planes and lines also endearingly showed vignettes of nature in the form of two birds pecking away in the foreground while the spiritual monolith stands timeless beckoning the frail humanity to redemption. It is this intellectualization that though appearing facile had deeper implications in its perceptual vision. It reflected his love of nature and the stimulus that the surroundings provided him. He continued in this mode till 1964. The Church Series was exhibited at the Group 1890 exhibition in Delhi in 1963, inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru. This series had created an impact with the viewers and artists at Delhi with its free flowing lines, geometricity of the patterns and the dynamism of space.

An Introspection for Stylistic Expression

Redappa Naidu in order to establish his expression or style had to go beyond the perceptual experimentations that he had vigorously researched in different media and techniques while at the Art Institution and later. Standing at the cross roads of his artistic career his anxiety and perplexity pushed him towards studying and understanding the Indian philosophical tradition. Many artists all over the country in the decade of 60s were intensely involved in a self-search. And particularly in the South, the mantle was taken on by Paniker and other senior artists including Redappa to make inventive statements imbued with a national character and underlined with regional identity.

Redappa Naidu inevitably was drawn into this vortex of cultural identity and historical authenticity with his individual search. Visually, materially, optically he had researched extrinsic dimensions of life and now there was an urge to move beyond and transcend to another arena that exclusively would establish his creative domainbe his domain. Thus began his introspection, a fallow moment in his creative production. His Muslim poet friend Wazir Rehman, a poet, helped him find direction suggesting that he interrogate and artistically explore the iconic image of Venkatesvara at Tirupathi. This in itself was an abstraction with vertical marks on its forehead and the large open fixed eyes bearing striking affinity with unsophisticated primitive form and shape. An investigation of this nature marked the beginning of his creative exploration that would lead to his **Deity series** [1963-1970] a preoccupation that remained with him till his death. Redappa's encounter with the icons, intimately associated with religious practices and worships had been an intrinsic part of everyday life in the country. In Tamil Nadu every small hamlet has a *Gramamatha* [village deity], whose protective function sanctioned sanctity to it.

The introspection and formal analysis began with the iconographic study of Venkatesvara at Tirupathi, which he formally organized by fragmenting into geometric planes akin to cubist principles. To negotiate the cultural grid, he astutely adopted the ubiquitous line of pictorial tradition for his expression. His experimentation with an icon that was worshipped by thousand of devotees made Redappa realize that he was venturing into a territory that in modern Indian art had not been trespassed for artistic investigation. He was attempting to project a sacred image onto a secular domain. And by employing the sacred image in this manner he was democratizing it with a secular strain. By transcending the sanctity Redappa Naidu reified it to serve his cause of artistic deviation – a preoccupation that remained with him. He shared this new conceptual approach with Paniker who was astounded by his original vision and introduced this new

perspective to his students at the institution. His first painting in this direction was **Deity Seated on a Lion** in 1964 **[Fig. 42]**. His technique and tools of visualization were handled with utmost confidence. The minimal deployment of line and its animated rendering realized the form of the deity and the lion with an unsophisticated appearance.

Redappa Naidu's journey from the church series to temple icons series is a direct attack on the premise of modernism in which the place for sacred is problematic. With the insertion of the popular into the modern it opens up the space, which for Clement Greenberg was an anathema. The Greenbergian ideology insisting upon the purity of 'high art' forms, is being catapulted into an arena in which the sacred transforms to the secular in order to pursue the iconic form to suit the artist's creative explorations. And a journey towards this marks Redappa among others to prefigure the postmodern. Redappa in interrogating the traditional iconography as a modern artist was making the act of creation constitute its own value. That is it ceased to serve religion and became a faith to serve his ends. The logical end of such an attitude was to turn creativity into an artistic expression having a noumen without being sacred to reach the mind's antipodes. Here the exploration of the iconography negates religious connotations to assume a value of spiritedness.

Redappa Naidu was attracted to the mythic material, which was a feature of modernity bearing similarity to Marc Chagall with his Hasidic tales. Though this was problematic with Greenbergian ideology, for Redappa it was a tradition in to which he was born and an intrinsic aspect of his 'Indian psyche'. This clearly helps define modernism within the Indian context. The myths in Indian culture has been an integral aspect of the people's and by adopting and pursuing in this direction Redappa declared his modernity to deliver himself into the world with an autobiographical imagery and a personalized signature. Consequently his deployment of the icons was not metaphorical but to gain metonymic extension. **[Fig. 43]**

It is by engaging with the indigenous traditions of his region that Redappa materially responded to local customs and styles that provided a fresh take on primitivism within the contemporary as well as fresh opportunities for staging popular forms of iconicity. This enabled a fulfillment of his aim to contemporarize traditional mythology and mystic elements of Indian spirituality. By transcending the written word in the Indian epics and myths he made it his visual language. Going beyond the cultural and temporal barriers he attempted to tap deep reservoirs of feelings and experiences from constructed epics and seamless myths. Redappa Naidu in his self-search settled for myths relating primarily to his philosophy to life that is the avowed claim to *ananda* or

happiness realized through the process of artistic creations. A process such as this also laid emphasis on eternal values that every religion stresses upon. The speculative and philosophical dimension of mythology was hence a response to religion and cultural history that served his purpose. Involved with the question of regional identity with Paniker, recourse to myths also provided an insight into the mind and character of the people to validate the authenticity of expression

Mediating through myths and epics, Redappa Naidu made possible translation of his concepts concerning politics of vision of the Indian culture. Mythologizing feelings and experiences hence became the common denominator of his pictorial visualization made manifest through dramatic representations, of a primary awareness of man in the universe. Myths do not arise in isolation but take their specific shapes from the cultural environment, which in this instance for Redappa was region based on the Telegu version of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Redappa Naidu by establishing his iconography through this medium was set to produce epic canvases [very large formats] with themes derived from Indian myths, epics and icons. These visions were furthered by his participation in the Group 1890.

The Group 1890

The Group 1890 spearheaded by J. Swaminathan was a search towards an answer for problematic Indian identity within the larger consciousness of internationalism. Established in 1962 it included leading artists like Ambadas, Jeram Patel, Himmat Shah, Eric Bowen, Bal Krishna Patel, Gulam Mohommed Sheikh, Rajesh Mehra, Jyoti Bhatt, Redappa Naidu and the sculptor Raghav Kaneria. The name 1890 was number of the house in Bhavnagar where the first meeting was held. Swaminathan invited Redappa Naidu to be a member and a representative from the South. The decision to invite artists from other centers stemmed from strategic concerns Swaminathan's invitation to Redappa Naidu was his admiration of his works and finding in it resonance of his ideas. Though Redappa never attended the inaugural session he participated in the exhibition that was organized by the Group in 1963 as mentioned earlier.

The Group 1890 was not a stylistic movement and its intents were critical introspection to break the hegemony of the Paris School. Said Swaminathan, "artists started looking at tradition now not as a stylistic continuation of the art of the past, but as a rediscovery of that spiritual identity, which in a different period and at different levels, had thrown up such marvelous expressions of creative imagination" The formation of this Group 1890 was to fulfill the quest for an ephemeral

quality of Indianness. Indian artists operating within the paradigm of Third World consciousness – a creation of the West that locked non-Western cultures and their views by absorbing them into an imperial representation. According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "the idolization of the natives is also a western fantasy that see them as a reservoirs of goodness – a process that denies the non-western cultures a chance to create their own world"[22]. Hence the argument of Indian artists of the preordained, natural supremacy assumed by western cultures needed revision with attention to the reciprocal influences and interpenetration of other world cultures. In this effort Nehru and the Mexican Ambassador to India Octavio Paz supported the Group 1890. In 1963, the Group 1890 held its exhibition at Rabindra Bhavan, Delhi. J. Swaminathan wrote the exhibition manifesto and the catalogue was introduced by the then Mexican Ambassador to India, Octavio Paz. On the works produced by the 1890 Group Geeta Kapur comments, "the attraction of the eleven-member Group 1890 to material/ritual/occult signs reissued the modernist enterprise in the coming years. It came to be situated with peculiar aptness in a visual culture of iconic forms still extant in India. This indigenism produced a playful modernist vocabulary replete with metaphorical allusions"[23].

Octavio Paz was renowned Mexican poet and intellectual whose presence within the country was significant. He was instrumental in exposing the Group to the concepts of Surrealism, Structuralism and Symbolist Art and his support proved influential to establish a rich intellectual atmosphere. The Group 1890 projected its agenda by denying the mode of the representation through history. This was done by "emphasizing the quality of the numenous image ['image proper'] which has a mythic presence. The image is conceived of as operating in the gap between thought and the seen. Its mythic presence is a corollary, to be seen in the context of a yearning to return to the primordial absolute state of being, wherein an immediacy of meaning can be experienced in the process of the manifestation of the image. Whatever be the history of its becoming, its being emanates its own connotations."[24].

Consequently it is significant to emphasize that the Group 1890 sought a pan Indian identity, was not formed on any regional or other considerations and on ideological affinity. The emphasis however was on the experimentation and a questioning awareness towards all 'conceptual inhibiting' of art. This was because Swaminathan had grasped the Indian artists undue reliance on stylistic parallelism with Modernism.

Redappa was influenced by the ideology of the Group 1890; and in productive dialogue and discussion with Paniker and others, together with his quest for self-expression, a restlessness had now set within him. His poet friend facilitated his search at this juncture as already mentioned that leads to rendering iconic and mythic representations, in articulated and spontaneous draftsmanship.

The Deity Series

The beginning of the road for his self-discovery was aided by visits to the Amman temple with his wife. Implicated in these icons were the human form and a feeling for the figure that was native to the culture of Redappa's predisposition. Says Redappa, "I decided to go deep into the subject and after reading the Indian epics and Puranas to which these religious forms are related, made up my mind to paint more of these while freeing them from all their earlier context and achieving a purely aesthetic expression. This was a journey that introduced me to new kind of imagery...that lay in the iconography of our region in terms of beauty and lyricism"[25].

In his **Deity Series** of 60s Redappa moved away from problems of representation to essentialising and abstracting the required elements that would be perceived for its content and meaning without implications of sanctity. The figures in his paintings became dominant imageries. Redappa had internalized the human form with his years of experience at rendering it that he could intuit the image in its abstract form loading it with significance simultaneously. He depersonalized it making it insubstantial but maintaining a measure of identity. **Durga [Fig. 44]** as a deity was not the traditional image but visualized as a concept. His expressions in art of the 'divine' were not only Tirupati Balaji but also **Ganesha** [mid 90s] **[Fig. 45]**. During this period of interrogation in 1962-63 his art took the form of live enquiry into the philosophy, which was at the root of Indian life. This was the time as he states when the entire country was trying to find its own identity in art expressions. The identity crisis caused creativity to discriminate between the roots of the past and to encounter the experiences of the present, which formed the artists' consciousness. Geeta Kapur aptly defines this process, "post-colonial nations are overwhelmed by a polemical search for direction and values as they face their dislocated cultures. There is an underlying search for identity, an identity defined in terms of their own tradition and their aspiration for the future"[26].

Redappa Naidu by intellectualizing on the sanctity of the icons and its related iconography was pushing the concepts from its ideational planes to pure aesthetic expressions. His modern sensibility was contextualized in narrative tradition. He was operating purely at an optical level

in making imagery. A transformation of the visual language was implicit to express new content. Hence with his **Deity Series** he developed his visual vocabulary with personalized idiom insisting on privileging the linear expression for effective aesthetic statements. He studied folk elements evident in village deities and other ubiquitous symbols like the snakes, parrots and geometric shapes especially the triangles **[Figs. 46, 47 &48]**. And in the early 60s this conscious research and encounter enabled him to map on to his concepts this search, which would lead him towards self-expression. Religious motifs served to intercede eternal human values that remained 'timeless' whatever the progress in terms of either science or technology. This static quality of time/space bears affinity to 'primitivism' in its ideology, which had underpinned the nascent modernism in the West. Redappa's self-expression in his paintings was a testimony of his integrity towards his regional idiom as manifest in folk arts juxtaposed with a continually self-questioning attitude towards life.

Redappa Naidu though an uncompromising traditionalist in his choice of subject matter he visualized all his concepts through the medium of oil – largely a Western technique. He had a short stint with pen and ink medium **[Fig. 49]** as a distraction from oils but never persisted because of its casual look. Naidu in his exploration of the oil medium translated its use according to his sensibility and needs. He avoided the impasto technique and imparted brilliance and luminosity to his colours through thin applications of colored tones on the canvas bearing in this respect a similarity towards Munuswamy's use of the technique **[Fig. 50]**. It also indirectly implied the water color washes reminiscent of the Bengal School that was an integral dimension of pedantry at the art institution. Like the others within the Madras Movement it was also Redappa's preoccupation to discard the illusion of third dimension and approach a planar reality that would place him within the mainstream art **[Fig. 51]**. The years of training and internalization of skill and techniques enabled an easy transition to this mode of representation. According to him technique and medium act as effective tools in the service of a creative artist.

Modern Dimensions on the Epics

The rendering and visualization of selected passages from Mahabharata and Ramayana epics was a trope, a turn away, from the iconic or other regional art forms towards a tradition in narration that Redappa would explore. In these large canvases he has attempted to conflate the cultural values in the epics with experiences of his modernity. This was translated through his traditional sensibilities and his predilection in that direction allowed him to realize that all human actions were culturally determined. In these epic series the relationship between the observer and the

observed achieves a primacy serving as a conduit for effectively translating human values through visual medium. Undoubtedly these epics have been read and meditated upon through the centuries but its visualization in contemporary vocabulary marks it as novel, innovative and different/radical. In the spirit of modernity, reverting to myths and religious iconography for subject matter echoed the ideological concepts in Surrealism with its repertoire of dreams, imagination and fantasy to what Rosalind Krauss terms it as unofficial modernism. Redappa Naidu reacted to this particular trend of modernity by defining not only the regional modern and Indian identity but also making it distinct from the International/American.

The epic is a living body with its multivalent programs dealing with all aspects of problematic in human life based on the secular, sacerdotal and spiritual. It fundamentally testified to the eternal struggle of evil against good, with the triumphant resurgence of virtues.

On the instruction of the patron Deendayal, Redappa Naidu illustrated the eighteen Parvas from the Mahabharata [1972-74] and fifteen episodes from the Ramayana [1974-86]. *Samsara Rathnam* was a Telegu translation of the epic Mahabharata composed by Nanaya. These *Parvas* had special significance for Redappa as it concerned the life of an individual on this earth, who had to rise above all human frailties to achieve his goal of truth. He illustrated these beginning with the *Stri Parva.* The Ramayana was also a Telegu translation of Valmiki and dealt exclusively with *Sundarakanda.*

Redappa in attempting to bring forth the concepts to the canvas meditated ascetically for hours. Mrs. Naidu recalls the moments of anguish and despair when he went through the agonies of conceptualizing and finally delivering it on canvas the various imageries from the depth of his consciousness. She said, "He lived in the painting. He would never give up unless he felt satisfied and the joy of its materialization, till then it would be moments of anguish and torment. He was like a mendicant deeply absorbed, grew a beard and was blissfully unaware of his surroundings when he was working. It is easy to do one Rama and one Krishna but to visualize it in thirty-four canvases was a herculean task"[27]. This clearly caused for Redappa Naidu an anxiety, a process of artistic prognosis, and the strategy of being able to live in those mythical images and have them living on the irreducible dimension of the canvas. And these attributes are modern for an individual pursuing individuality within a movement that had its agenda defined namely nativism/indigenism and regionalism. The eighteen *parvas* are as follows: the *Stril Parva,* **[Fig. 52]** *Adi Parva,* **[Fig. 53]** *Sabha Parva,* **[Fig. 54]** *Vana Parva,* **[Fig. 55]** *Virata,*

Udyoga and *Bhisma Parvas,* **[Fig. 56]** *Drona Parva Karna* and *Salya Parva,* **[Fig. 57]** *Sauptika Parva*[**Fig. 58]** *Santi Anusantika Asvamedhaka, Asramavasika, Mausala Parvas, Maha Prasthanika,* **[Fig. 59]** ***Svargarohana***[**Fig. 60**]. In the Ramayana series to mention a few are the Rama and Lakshmana with Jatayu, Hanuman carrying the Sanjeevi Mountain, Hanuman visits Sita in Lanka, **[Fig. 61]** Anguli Pardhamam **[Fig. 62]** and Hanuman worshipping, Brahma, Indra, Surya and Vayu [28].**[Fig. 63]**.

A Critique of his Aesthetics

The visualization of these *parvas* had been rendered with his fluid but nervous line - light, uneven rendered with dry brush to mark it as his signature style. It is his line that embodied profusion of emotions and strain. Sensitively deployed the line created pictograms reducing the images to its basic essence. His line was so dramatic and confident that it carried the weight of entire composition within it. The fluidity and the confidence of it manifest in every stroke - mellifluous or acquiring a quality of drama, excitement, tension, emotions, serenity and meditation. The conceptualization of the entire epic lies in the spirited line hallmarking it as the radical departure from many of his contemporaries who were also operating from within the same milieu in the country. By making it contemporary the dynamic line brings to bear upon it the artists traditional sensibility that translates as modern. Opposing any residual attempts at third dimension the forms were freely evolved covering the entire surface of the canvas. This method of composing also inscribed it with decorative design that was an inherent part of Redappa's visual idiom. For Redappa the design element has greater valence since his job at the Weaver's Service Centre concentrated these artistic efforts and indirectly bore their impress upon his canvases. Nearly all his compositions reveal decorative patterning marking it as a stylistic feature of the regional modern within the Madras Art Movement. What was more critical was the cameo grouping of various episodes within each *parva* that Redappa brilliantly visualized focusing on the heightened and dramatic moments to convey his expressions.

If the decorative or two-dimensional space has reinforced the simplicity of the grouping of his imagery it also allows an easy negotiation of the eyes on the canvas to clearly comprehend the written script on the canvas. The script and the image augurs well within the composition. The use of script by Redappa Naidu very closely approximates the modernist employment of it, that is, very detatched and directed towards aesthetic purpose. These scripted lines are painstakingly rendered in Davangari script illustrating the relevant passages from the epics. The words and images juxtapose to create visual textures that enhance the mythic dimensions of these paintings.

The colours that arbitrated his expressions were equally romantic, melodramatic, sensuous, poetic and expressive. Making use of a wide spectrum of tones and playing upon their subtle values Redappa Naidu like an expert musician had calibrated the composition without a note out of place to translate his chromatic organization to appear meditative. The monumentality of these epic canvases reveal the intensity of purpose as well the dedication. The superb craftsmanship in managing the lines and colored tones spill out of his years of experience and formal training. **[Fig. 64]**

His grandiose compositions nevertheless are not meant to be read with sanctity. In the modernist tradition the sacred is subverted and it is not a vital requisite to possess knowledge of epics in order to comprehend what is being rendered. The colours and lines symbolically explored the narrative of the story; and although the varied *slokas* are scripted the vast size prevents them from being read comfortably. Ultimately it remains a dynamic personalized vision of the artist. Nevertheless these were not meant for didactic purpose, nor to educate, it was ordained for the private domain of the art collector and his connoisseurship. However Redappa Naidu's oeuvres of the classic remains in the domain of serious art that must provoke thought and stimulate imagination. There are of course several artists in India who had engaged themselves in painting traditional themes in modern idiom. The distinction of Redappa Naidu in this series lay in his conceptualization and employment of his evolved visual vocabulary to transcribe the epic and displace it from the domain of the 'sacred' and make it secular by its approach.

While Mahabharata is crowded with incidents and tensions and every crucial episode is a climax of political, social or moral turbulences, the Ramayana is predominantly lyrical. On this theme he has painted fifteen canvases. Playing upon the main protagonist in the Ramayana he delineates the values of self-sacrifice, nobility and the philanthropic truths in all its characters. The change of style in Ramayana Series manifests his new representational regime. The palette became softer and delicate. The script faded out and meaning and form were conveyed dominantly through his colours. The semiotics of his language reflects a meditated imagery, broadly rendered to manifest his message. The reduced imagery has been abstracted and identified by the traditional employment of colours like blue for Rama, van dyke brown for Hanuman and orange for Lakshman. Despite the reduced forms the caricatured style of Redappa Naidu explicitly heightens the emotional dimensions of his works. No details ever distract from the main protagonist in various episodes in the compositions. This visual short hand speaks volumes about

the artists ability in facilitating direct messages sans the representational elements. What remarkably comes through in both the epic series is Redappa Naidu's strength of perception deep introspection on abstract qualities of pathos, anger, ecstasy and even speed as in **Hanuman carrying the Sanjeevani Mountain.[Fig. 65]**

Redappa Naidu postulated the philosophy of his life concretized through select episodes from the two epics. It had been referenced with great clarity through his intellectualization in this direction. In the 70s and 80s these monumental oeuvre of Redappa established him as an artist of great energy and contemporary sensibility. His predilection towards narratives for personal expressions made him reject total abstraction of Greenbergian type. This perhaps explained his disappointment of the exhibition 'Two Decades of American Painting' curated by Clement Greenberg and held at Rabindra Bhavan in 1967 at Delhi. Redappa undeniably confessed to large size paintings making their impact; but what crucially disappointed him was that there was no content in the formalized expressions. Said Redappa, "it no doubt was an exhibition of American painters but it had little or no influence on me at all. Where was the content or any subject matter in these huge works?"[29].

Marking a departure from icons and narrative epics Redappa Naidu in the mid 90s gravitates to the theme on woman and motherhood inspired from Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam.* Of this series comments Redappa Naidu, "The kind of social status given to woman in the time of Kalidasa can be seen through his *Abhijnanasakuntalam* **[Fig. 66].** The thinking and behavior of man towards woman from the great poet's time till today is the same. Sakuntalam lives in one form or the other in every home of this country. Hence the Sakuntalam paintings serve as a tribute to the women of India"[30]. Redappa Naidu in conceptualizing the narrative of *Sakuntalam* was not essentialising the feminine gender rather he was extolling the virtues of nurturing, selflessness, dedication, tender love and care that a woman as a wife and mother can resolutely precipitate. His style in this series was reconciled by similarity of passion and intensity that were the salient characteristics of his earlier works. But here he was celebrating the experiences of nurturing care and genuine warmth and love experienced at the hands of his devoted wife and daughters through a protracted illness. Painting the story of Sakuntala was expiation and an assertion of empathy and admiration for woman who revealed their inner strength and tenacity in moments of crisis.

Redappa perhaps was valorizing these emotional dimensions of the epic to lend valency in projecting women as heroic. The narration in his works is effortless as he vitally selects an epitome moment and materializes it through his limpid poetic line and colours. Redappa Naidu in this series is not approaching the classic theme through perspectives of feminist ideologue. In every sense of the term he was a patriarch of the family to nurture and protect them.

Padma Prasad, his daughter recapitulates the visual expressions of her father aptly. "At a time of avant-garde experimentation as part of a frantic search for identity, Redappa Naidu clicks on our tradition at its most vital spot. In a land where every stone, tree and animal is sacred and boasts of a divine association, it points to the perceptive genius of the artist that he could put his brush on this active ingredient of the past alive in every street corner of Madras"[31].

A.P. SANTHANARAJ [1932-]: NOUMENOUS SPACE AND HUMAN IMAGERY

Santhanaraj's **[Fig. 67]** creative technical explorations, his zest, enthusiasm and passion for art mark him to be an innovator who along with his colleagues at the Art Institution injected momentum into the indigenous agenda that defined and developed the Madras Art Movement. His significance as a teacher and artist equals Paniker and Munuswamy within the institution. An alumnus of the College of Arts and Crafts he graduated with a diploma in 1958 and was immediately absorbed as a teacher. He steadily progressed within the institution to be made principal in 1985 and retired in 1990.

Santhanaraj could be described as a figurative artist, for whom the human imagery was a dominant trope to critically define and communicate his expressions. His compositions have pastoral themes in which the figure of the woman plays a central role. Largely the compositions have single figures and very rarely did he evolve paintings that had groups. His affinity in this direction bears relevance to the works of Munuswamy, among others to mobilize the female form as a vehicle to bear the weight of his subjectivity. His rendering and delineation of them particularly in his drawings exhibit primeval characteristics bordering on expressionist distortions **[Fig. 68]**. In paintings the forms are essentially reductive and attenuated projecting a modern vision and experiences but with affinity to regional folk arts in particular its stridency, boldness and an iconic frontality.

Integrated with this vision was Santhanaraj's cerebration on the problematic of picture making. His area of research and exploration in painting was primarily directed towards negotiating space

and exploring its numenous values. This negotiation of space was effectively combined with line and colour. In discussing his paintings Santhanaraj lays emphasis on the 'atmosphere' that a work of art should convey. In pursuing the value of 'atmosphere', which remains an abstract and an illusive element he made it the central premise of his creations. Subsumed within this were the human figures and other objects that Santhanaraj provided as points of reference to validate his conceptual vision.

Innovative Pictorial Experimentations

Santhanaraj is an artist constantly involved with experimentation and exploration. His restless nature and impetuous attitude hence makes him ideal material for creating works that manifests dynamic energy. Santhanaraj along with other senior artists was instrumental in directing a move towards the formation of the Madras Art Movement. His personality served as an example to the young aspiring students. His creative struggles to realize his experimentations in drawings and paintings, integrating human imagery with colours and its tonal values on a two dimensional plane added to his repertoire. Said Santhanaraj, "When I joined the School of Arts and Crafts I was lucky to have great teachers to instruct me. Today when I look back I realize that it was D.P. Roy Chowdhary who encouraged me to explore form and colours in an intuitive manner. Paniker was constantly discussing various problems of modern art and this stimulated my intellect and imagination. It was Paniker's firm conviction that Modern Indian art had relevance only if it strengthened our national identity. And this led him to emphasize that we must draw inspiration from our own tradition"[32]. The lessons learnt from the stalwarts provided the basis for the pedagogy but Santhanaraj went beyond to boldly experiment with modern techniques.

At this juncture it becomes vital to emphasize that the artists working in late 50s and very early 60s laid emphasis on the exploration of the various techniques in variety of media and diverse supports This essentially was to move away from conventions and objectifications of traditional media and techniques both in painting and sculpture and towards an adventurism that would be technique-oriented. The techniques included mixed media, oil pastels, colored pen and ink, encaustic together with traditional medium of watercolor and oil painting. The support necessarily was no longer paper either for oils or watercolours but board, canvas and metal came to be extensively employed. This search for new techniques and support reinforces the modernists' anxieties and tensions for individuation and exploration so as to situate him within the contemporary milieu. Within the Madras Group these exploratory agenda points to their awareness of consciously utilizing modern technology in creating art works, towards which

Paniker's concepts of allowing creative freedom motivated the students and teachers alike to be innovative.

Methods and process of preparing the canvases offered opportunities particularly for obtaining textures. That is, in the priming stage different types of materials like sand or sawdust could be added over which when paint was applied, it created titillating visual effects. It was Santhanaraj who experimented with all these and particularly in the encaustic medium for exploring the texture in his works. The pigments were mixed with wax and while still hot and in a liquid state he would apply it on the canvas working rapidly.

His adventurous spirit and mental agility energized Santhanaraj to delve into using any materials available at hand to create textures and simultaneously understand how these can be creatively mediated on his canvas. An experimental work investigating different materials like thread pasted on the canvas and painted over incidentally was accepted in the First Triennale of India[33]. Gopinath who was a student of Santhanaraj in late 60s enthuses about his teacher in the manner Santhanaraj would work at his canvases in a fit of temper and any subject would be a sufficient point of reference to stimulate his imagination. Forms he said magically flowed from his brushes and the colours were so strongly internalized that he never contemplated upon its selection. It flowed uninterruptedly. This Gopinath describes as an unforgettable and an invaluable experience for students who watched their teachers at work in the classroom. C. Douglas draws interesting comparison between Munuswamy and Santhanaraj. He says, "Munuswamy would come into the class room when the students worked at their canvases, lift his umbrella to point out the work and ask the identity of the student, make a few grunts and walk out. Santhanaraj on the other hand would be ebullient he would do a little dance turn the painting around, put it on the ground and the comments and praises would pour forth spontaneously"[34].

In keeping with the modern ideology of progress and experimentations Santhanaraj throughout his career was involved in this process with different techniques. Anjali Sircar comments, "Santhanaraj, in the process of experimentations, achieved a new range of consciousness, no longer entirely linked to his original knowledge, but leading to an independence of spirit that made him fight a bitter battle with his own self for a number of years"[35]. The complexities combined with anxieties inherent within Santhanaraj to define his artistic territories on his own terms were so strong that he never entertained mediocrity in his own creations. This factor led to an internal struggle within him and was eventually projected in his aggressiveness towards the

exploration of techniques. And it is no surprise that he approached his canvases with power and force translating these intangible elements through his manipulation of brush strokes and textured surfaces.

Santhanaraj in venturing with his experimental techniques had set the momentum for the development and progress of his art. Even today when looking at a work of art it is not the form or the composition that attracts his attention but rather the technique. And if he finds the technique, which he is not able to effect he would question the entire process with keen interest and enthusiasm[36]. This marks Santhanaraj's distinction – as modernist and contemporary by virtue of his restless mental attitude to be constantly exploring and experimenting.

Santhanaraj's approach to painting was that it should be able to create an analogy with music. A romantic notion nevertheless but this romanticising seems to be at the very heart of the Madras Art Movement. This obsession to relate painting to music was asserted by him when he made reference of creating an 'atmosphere'. He says, "just as in music so also in painting, it is the atmosphere which should be one's magnificent obsession"[37]. In this respect he comes close to Walter Pater's famous dictum that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music". Interestingly Santhanaraj subverts this approach within modernists discourse, by emphasizing on his cultural vision, taking the form of human imagery especially the female form derived from his observation of the tribals and the rural women from his hometown of Thiruvanamalai. This also marks a posture of difference from the Greenbergian ideology of pure formalism where he attempts to define meaning and purpose of his art vis-à-vis society.

The analogy with music in the formatting of his compositions helped in clarifying the significant role that space privileged. Space in academic realism be it a painting or a drawing was a view through window enhancing the authoritarian position of the artist from one viewpoint negating temporal and spatial sequences. This method of rendering space was the centrality of pedantic teaching at the institution when Santhanaraj was student under the regime of D.P. Roy Chowdhary. And it continued to be a carry over of the colonial baggage until Paniker took over the institution's headship and wrought significant changes in terms of exploring modernist stylistic features.

In the early 60s Santhanaraj exploring the intangible element of space was making an attempt to transcend the illusive reality and put it to serve intuitive demands. It was a driving force within

him to investigate the noumenous dimension of this abstract element through an object. And he reached his conclusion that ideally human figure would serve his purpose. Like space, which was a mysterious and mystical element for Santhanaraj, human figure and especially the female form attracted him with this similar dimension of mystery and mysticality. He reinforced his spatial experimentations through the metaphor of the female form. "The female form is always a mystery and I have been unable to solve this mystery. I am in the midst of it. I am part of it. I am playing my own game as part of that mystery. Beyond this I have no words"[38]. Space and female form hence conflated to realize the numenous dimensions that had become his obsessions indirectly reflecting his subjectivity in exploring them. This search also implicates Santhanaraj's efforts to relate space to life and his pursuits materialized through the arbitration of nude figures that had 'a touch of abstraction and a mass of cubic chaos'. According to Anjali Sircar, "as he journeyed towards his self-discovery he painted **Red Space, Through the Forest, [Fig. 69] A Version from Vrindavan [Fig.70]** and made numerous such works which he refused to exhibit. The problem of his own identity haunted him and in the throes of this struggle he threw away his canvases when he could not achieve the desired results. He slashed his canvases into pieces when he was unhappy and burnt them when he was angry "[39].

The Versatile indigenous Line

Santhanaraj to create the atmosphere in his pictures thoroughly studied line and color in relation to two-dimensional space. In the 60s, line as an element, was investigated vigourously, by Paniker, Dhanapal among many senior artists. Paniker had declared the Indian quality of line to be basic in all creations. Santhanaraj had disputed this dimension telling his teacher, "line is a line it is universal"[40], but as he investigated he realized that the universal valence it carries has subsumed in it a national and even a regional character. Line with regional distinction became a tool of investigation that was interrogated by Adimoolam, Redappa Naidu and Anthony Doss including Santhanaraj. Derived largely from the repertoire of regional folk and tribal arts as well the canonical pictorial and plastic traditions the element of line provided a basis of distinction for these artists within the artistic circle. Paniker's line as he personalized it comprised of short choppy strokes and with a nervous edge to it. Adimoolam also developed his rhythmic line with firm strokes to evolve his figurative imagery continuing as one integrated whole where the connotation to mass was deleted and forms and figures appeared to float freely on the surface of the picture. Redappa Naidu developed it with a mellifluous touch and used it economically in his paintings.

Santhanaraj attempted the experimentation with line in which he dissolved the mass of the figures completely in daring configurations that were aggressive, bold, forthright and narrative. His **Prodigal Son [Fig. 71]** exemplifies this approach. Wittily Santhanaraj parodies his own return and recognition of line as carrying national character and ethos. It is this quality of his art that makes his works relevant within the Madras Group. His intelligent interpretation through judicious employment of subject matter heightens his subjectivity. Prodigal Son also enthuses about a return to national identity through reinscription and approximation of vernacular and canonical imagery in art. This approach in interrogating pre-modern traditions undoubtedly bears affinity to European Modernists, but what sets it apart is his individuated cultural intervention at this particular moment in its national history, namely for authenticity and identity. Though the theme may be Christian but its interpretation through 'Indian' temperament makes it distinct.

The subject matter thus carries the weight of his subjectivity and allows simultaneously his linear forays. A loose caricatured expressionism marks his style. Essentially in this composition he has established the forms that have been freely evolved remaining on the planar surface by slashing the illusion of depth. In this pen and wash drawing, Santhanaraj deftly has used the tones in between the figures to heighten the compositional effect with contrasting play of light and shade areas. The emotional content of this ink drawing is transcribed through his reductive imagery as well as his insights born out of experiences and sensitivity to life. The line of Santhanaraj as in folk art tradition has no sophistication becoming loose, spontaneous and freely evolving **[Figs. 72, 73 & 74]**. A stark forthrightness, stridency in handling the formal elements, distorted facial features and reductive bodies mark it as salient to his works. By his personalized treatment of the elements he unconsciously creates a strong sense of design that imparts a look of patterning to the whole composition.

Santhanaraj operating from a vitiating milieu within the Institution was encouraged in his efforts to push through to a solution that would make line the main protagonist in creative expressions. In this respect Santhanaraj together with Paniker and Dhanapal were instrumental in exploring line with versatility and in a virtuoso manner, the lead largely having been provided by H.V. Ram Gopal. If Santhanaraj's oeuvre is to be categorized then his drawings will have the same valence as his paintings. A prolific artist since he has lent his creativity to sculpture also; his pictorial works could be broadly defined as semi abstracts and figurative. Said Santhanaraj, "my art is abstract, very abstract. But there is no distortion in it. Abstraction according to me, is giving importance to the most important aspect of the object and eliminating the unimportant though it

might exist"[41]. By laying emphasis on essential characteristic of the human imagery, Santhanaraj thus prevents it from transcending it to an abstract plane and retains a touch with reality.

Santhanaraj like Adimoolam realized that if he has to make his forms plastic and add a breadth of dimension, color had to be meaningfully brought in. If Adimoolam introduced color in his works it was to get away from the heaviness of the mass of chiaroscuro that manifested stark contrasts. This turn towards color would aid Santhanaraj in his conscious effort to symbolically create the atmosphere that he was so obsessed about. Atmosphere or space that he used interchangeably came to his experience through long hours spent at the seaside at Cholamandal Village where he held discussion with Paniker on issues problematic to art. The unending horizon, the vast expanse of the sky, the numerous galaxies and the universe held mysteries of their existence for him. By these contemplative measures he set the tone for exploring the numenous and in Indian philosophical tradition to unveil the reality behind the illusion. These dimensions of his personality leave little doubt about the complexities of his mind and his constant struggle to find a meaningful expression. The angst mediated his potent creativity.

Colour as 'Atmosphere'

Intuitively Santhanaraj started his introspection of this ambience, the noumen, he wanted to tackle materially through forms in his paintings. This meditation extended to the quality of light and how the forms are effected by it. Towards this, Santhanaraj source of inspiration was deeply affected by Rembrandt, whose employment of light was subverted for spiritual ends and not optical effects. Comments Santhanaraj, "Rembrandt was an angel of light and no one has surpassed that purity of light". Within the pedagogical practice that was initiated by D.P. Roy Chowdhary [particularly in the study of Western Renaissance masters, a practice carried on by Paniker that also included modern European artists], there was a close scrutiny of the relationship in the use of colours and techniques. This was to examine how a particular technique in employing colours would reflect the quality of light from the paintings. The curriculum was structured to include copying European Renaissance masters and towards this practice, Rembrandt, for many of the artists and students held fascination. As Muralidharan the student of Santhanaraj says, "Rembrandt was particularly studied because he created the effect of night during the day. He used candle light and the dramatic effects it produced and this was a departure from other contemporary artists of his own time who faithfully rendered natural light"[42]. And for Santhanaraj who was a student of D.P. Roy Chowdhary, Rembrandt had deeper implication and meaning especially in his use of colours as light revealed it. In realizing that it is light that allows

forms and objects to be perceived his insight drew him intuitively towards color. Like Achuthan who manifested similar ideas about light and colours when he said that absolute colours lead to absolute light, Santhanaraj was moving towards the same philosophy and colors took on a precedence of immense magnitude. Color became the vehicle and defined his subjectivity. Colours as Santhanaraj visualized it were put in the service of creating an ambience within his paintings.

Santhanaraj who was deeply attracted to the female form because he could not unravel its mystery used it as a motif to explore his pictorial dimensions. The fact that women have been repeatedly represented in modernist art by no means implies that their bodies signify 'women'. On the contrary a nude women is rarely anything but a motif. An approach with such innuendo is in keeping with Greenbergian philosophy. In terms of the modern period, the formal characteristics of the nude have often been represented as a pretext for modernist experimentations with form. That the female body should be the starting point for many formal experiments is noticeable in the seminal works in the modernist canon exemplified by Manet's Olympia, Cezanne's Grand Bathers, Picasso's Demoiselles di Avignon and Henri Matisse's Pink Nude. These artists have taken more radical liberties with female form. Despite these overt formulations in the use of female form objectively as a motif, in the case of Santhanaraj it is not so simplistic and carries the hidden agenda of the male gaze.

In dealing with the problematic female form he pared away the inessentials to espouse the cause of color and line. The latter two elements became the protagonist in structuring his compositions. Space further enhanced the ambience in which the female forms were suggested. It became purely a line drawing draining the corporeality of the form to appear as a collage on the picture surface **[Fig. 75].** The female figures invariably in Santhanaraj's compositions are set in pastoral fields an echo of his rural sensibility that was deeply entrenched for him as it was for others within the Madras Art Movement. Despite modernity's attitude to reductivity, sensuousness pervades his female forms. This quality is made manifest through posture and evocative shapes. However Santhanaraj in this respect was not far from the influence of Indian sculptural and pictorial traditions playing upon his sensibility, in which the sensousness of the woman is dramatized based on canonical dictates.

Interestingly for Santhanaraj the female form as a trope also comes to have valence to define his indigenism/nativism. It indirectly allowed representation of the male gaze since it opened up the

space for power play. Santhanaraj implicates the female body as a site for male gaze when he says, "that she is a mystery". This is to imply that the idea of the nude as being somehow 'clothed in art' and therefore desexualized is an important one, which in part, derives its authenticity from Kantian notion of a 'disinterested aesthetic'. Naked or nude, semi-clothed or fully clad, the female body can never be an innocent category, beyond cultural definitions and it is a perpetual carrier of overwhelmingly male signs. The relationship between an image and reality it purports to represent is inherently political, resting on the Foucaldian theory, based on knowledge-power nexus, making thus the depiction of the nude woman political. That is artist do not present her rather they represent her. The female body with all its implication – clothed, semi-clothed or nude – is more than just a formal site of modernity where modernists experiment with technical radicalism. Rather the female nude is the very site on which male fears, fantasies and projections are played out. Santhanaraj's complexities, anxieties and tensions perhaps conflate with the female imagery to go beyond 'motif' to underscore his male gaze. Santhanaraj whose rural roots with its emphasis on conventions and traditions inscribe his persona is also simultaneously emphasizing the patriarchal dominance integral to his vision and perspective. This phenomenon is common to the artists of the Madras Group and hence the female form is subverted to become the carrier of male sexuality indirectly.

Santhanaraj's female forms are particularly drawn from the tribal community fundamentally defining indigenity. In this respect he comes close to Munuswamy as both these artists in their ideologies used the particularized female form as a vehicle to communicate their expressions. Santhanaraj's home town of Tiruvanamalai where he spent the best part of his childhood and youth as he continues to do so even today carries the nostalgia as well the sights and sounds within him internalized over years. Juxtaposed with these experiences were his study of tribals at Ootacamund in the tract of Nilgiri hills in the Deccan and all this served as grist for the artist's mill. Formally through his negotiations with line and color he was attempting to go beyond the static representation of the human form and wanted to focus upon the movement of the figures be they dancers, mourners or a procession. The dancers particularly held his attention so he could tackle the problematic movement. In **The Drummers** [1963] **[Fig. 76]**, the concentration of the musicians as they rhythmically sway to the beat of the music they produced enchanted and excited him. The figures have been reduced to their essentials but what comes through with clarity is the inherent movement of the drummers and their involvement. There is an archaic minimal quality, which together with distortion marks it as expressionistic. Incidentally for Santhanaraj his modernist sensibility is reflected in his preoccupation with the subaltern

community of the hill tribals - the Todas of Nilgiris. It also allows for an interesting comparison with Picasso's Les Demoiselles D'Avignon in which the inclusion of tribal masks and ancient conventions of representation were integrated to mark his modernist ventures of unsophisticated intellectualization. In the case of Santhanaraj his imagery blends well the notion of primitivism with indigenism. Santhanaraj in this particular painting has used blotches of paint around the outline of the forms heightening the textural quality in his pictures.

Santhanaraj undoubtedly is a brilliant colorist as all of his works testify. He essentially privileged tones and values of blues and greens over other colours. Symbolically Santhanaraj is crossing the threshold to be in another space and perhaps another universe. The verdant greens apparently pins him to the spirit of the earthly existence. There can be little doubt that Santhanaraj as he worked the backgrounds of his paintings created an aura of mystery, of the enchanted unknown in, which one can be drowned **[Fig. 77]**. Materially through calculated brushwork and paint he methodically divides the surface into patches of shapes and forms that he fills with colors that dominantly are tones of blue, purple and green. Within these the female form will loom out as dark silhouettes adding to the strangeness of the whole. His paintings have an architectonic quality in their structured organization. The geometricity of the spatial construct remains his salient feature. There is an amazing amount of craft that goes into the production of these paintings. Craft, skill and ingenuity hence blend with his brilliant chromatic orchestrations to produce an ambiguity of space, becoming the main player of his compositions. **[Figs. 78, 79 & 80]**

Santhanaraj's works were first shown at the Kumar Gallery in 1958 and later in 1998. A retrospective of his exhibition was held at the C.M.C. in Delhi in 1990. Santhanaraj as a persona could not be concerned with organizations or having systematic working methods. His primal concern is to dissipate his creative energies through his painted statements. Because of this disposition, his works were never exhibited on a regular basis and since he did not want it as other artists have testified, buyers came to his studio and bought his works. Soli Daruwala of Sarla Gallery [1965] fame today has a collection of Santhanaraj's works. He does not purchase them nor does he intend to exhibit them, the artist gives him the works in return for the allowances given by Daruwalla to afford his painting materials [45].

Santhanaraj and the Madras Art Movement

Santhanaraj played a strategic and dynamic role in the growth and development of the Madras Art Movement. His independence of mind and autonomous working method did not make him and Paniker very compatible. But what is interesting in the relationship shared by Paniker and Santhanaraj is that the latter held him in great respect and revered him in a truly traditional manner of *guru-sishya parampara*. Santhanaraj was not too inclined towards the proselytisation that Paniker was advocating in researching the traditional materials to be interpreted according to artists will. The impetuosity in Santhanaraj disallowed any system to work on him. His reckless spontaneity can be identified with his working methods. In late 50s when Husain's paintings were making waves within the country particularly his horses Santhanaraj followed in Husain's footsteps to create magnificent horses. But when Paniker pointed out that he was facelessely rendering imitations he tore up his canvases[46]. As a student under Roy Chowdhary when the latter corrected his work, Santhanaraj dismissed it as saying "this is not Santhanaraj, Where is the Santhanaraj in this painting?"[47]. He was not only visually strident in his paintings, but also equally verbose with his comments and spoke his mind loud and clear. It was strongly felt by Santhanaraj that no artist could grow under the dominant shadow of Paniker and when he made this comment to him "that nothing grows under the Banyan tree", Paniker was quick with a repartee that "he was enjoying the cool breeze"[48].

Santhanaraj's regional sensibility manifests in his oeuvre. This was evident in the primeval quality of his line, the strong reductive simplicity of his forms, the iconic frontality that were typically derivative of folk and tribal arts. He drew his sustenance in art from life around him **[Fig. 81]** and that for him remained the important stimulus. He reinforced his 'Indianness' and indirectly its nativism by his themes of pastoral life individuated exclusively through his mystical space, the decorative line and passionate colours . In his style he incorporated the regional and folk inspired imagery as cubist fragmented forms imbued with an expressionist feel. In the 'Indian' tradition he constructed the figures sensuously with an earthy feel for the form but within modernist trends he explores it purely as an object within two-dimensionality of the picture plane implicating the male gaze. His female form is idealized in the tradition of classical Indian pictorial art observed in the murals at Thanjavur and Sittanavasal. An interesting aspect of his landscape construction was the manner in which the foreground is engaged with narrative elements while the background was not defined but rises up as a wall. It is this area of his compositions that challenged him to which he responded by fracturing the space as series of decorative shaped patches. This patched treatment was intentional to go beyond opticality and

create an 'atmosphere' of mystery and strangeness. Santhanaraj's originality and novel approach to picture making is identified in this area It is this ambiguous definition between the foreground and the background that imparts a mystical aura or 'atmosphere' that Santhanaraj equates to music. His paintings and drawings convey the same feel. In the tradition of the Madras Art Movement his works mark a different signpost.

Santhanaraj continues to paint in the same mode today. His medium however varies from oils to acrylics to water colours to colored felt pens. His narrative themes remain pastoral as also his female forms. **[Fig. 82 & 83]**. There is in his works a sense of heightened attenuation bordering on stylization. **[Figs. 84, 85 & 86]** Collectively these accretions lend his created expressions a sense of decorative design and patterning providing a familial link with the Madras Group.

C.J. ANTHONY DOSS [1933-] A RETURN TO THE REAL – JOURNEY FROM INDIGENISM TO ACADEMIC REALISM

Anthony Doss **[Fig. 87]** emerges from within the Madras Art Movement to inscribe a different narrative. That is he is an artist who was actively engaged with nativist agenda in consonance with his colleagues and students. In addition, he was equally exposed to the modernist European styles, but gradually he moved away from all these activities to mark his return to a style that could be described as 'Neo-Academic Realism'. This partially is self-explanatory, as a reaction to his unhappiness and dissatisfaction with Paniker after the establishment of the Cholamandal Artist Commune and its related legalities analyzed in Chapter II. Because of this Anthony Doss set his artistic gaze towards a style that Paniker strongly wanted to axe and also to have no residual remains either. This essentially was the empiricist-perceptual approach rooted in academic realism much favoured by D.P. Roy Chowdhary for whom Doss manifested immense respect. These deep psychological reactions get inflected as protests and disagreement to chart a personal trajectory that would be in direct opposition to Paniker's vision. And Doss in early 70s was disillusioned enough to strike his independent path and turned towards academic realism to define his style and mark it as his personal forte.

Anthony Doss's predilection for drawing from a very young age led him to copy images and compositions from magazines. Close to his house in Pursuwakkam in Chennai was a studio where film banners were painted in late 40s. Fascinated by the process of banner making he spent endless hours watching the artists bring alive the film icons of that age.

A chance meeting with his father's friend who had influential connections in the Madras School of Arts and Crafts afforded an opportunity to realize his dreams of becoming an artist. He was admitted in the Design Department from where he took his Diploma in two years and joined the Painting Department finishing the course in four years eventually completing his academic training in six years instead of nine in 1954. Soon after he left for Bombay to find employment. In this commercial hub of the country art was actively experimented and accepted by its public. While in Bombay he had an opportunity to view the Exhibition of K.K. Hebbar at Bhulabhai Desai Institute. He was awed by the master's works convinced in his decision to return to Madras and take up painting seriously as a profession.

As Anthony Doss recalls[49], "unfortunately in Madras the art scene was not so volatile as in Bombay. The presence of few Europeans there had exposed the artists to the international art scenario and this added momentum, which made many painters to venture into bold experiments resting in the knowledge that these were modernist formulae and hence accepted within international standards. In addition, the painters had enough exposure in media where émigré art critics espoused their cause in leading English dailies or a magazine like Illustrated Weekly of India where A.S. Raman was the editor. On the other hand in the city of Madras experimentations in art remained a narrow field of exposure with the public largely unaware of it. But the paradox here was that even if they were exposed it would be beyond their comprehension as their sensibility was not geared towards fine arts as it was towards the appreciation and enjoyment of music and dance. With no magazines to espouse their cause or newspaper that carried articles of the art scene the Madras public largely remained ignorant or were disinterested. Hence the prevailing circumstances prevented the artists from venturing into bold experiments because it would either go unnoticed or they would be derided". These existential circumstances made Anthony Doss to look for work opportunities in the School of Arts and Crafts resting assured on the grounds that an institutional backup would enable involvement and offer ample opportunities to experiment and paint seriously. In 1956/57 he joined as an Instructor and eventually retired as Principal in 1991.

Doss the Painter

A student of both D.P. Roy Chowdhary and K.C.S. Paniker he was particularly influenced by the former whose active perceptual empiricist approach was to find expression in his painting and drawings. He had great admiration for Paniker because of his insistence on exploring modernist styles and incorporating it with individual expressions. Later when Paniker turned his attention

towards regional definition Doss was actively involved and participated in this core group. So within the nativist agenda that was gathering momentum in the 60s Doss became an active participant to its regional based ideology. With a placid mindset that knew of no rebellion but deeply committed to his art and vision, Doss systematically veered towards Christian themes to realize his expressions in a regional mould.

It had been a mandatory practice at the Institution for the students to study the rich art tradition not only of their region but also of their country. On the study tours introduced by Paniker, the teachers accompanied the students and Anthony Doss was exposed to the rich pictorial and plastic arts of his region and came under the influence of folk art that strongly marked his sensibility. His compositions with active dynamic line and rich textural colours reflected a strong regional bias. **[Figs. 88, 89 & 90]** Doss was a proficient artist since the tradition of pedagogy within the institution insisted upon perfection of skills in drawing and delineating any subject at hand.

As a student he had studied the European Masters and had come under the spell of Peter Paul Rubens and Rembrandt. Both these artists had worked with light as their expressive medium. The former exploring the religious themes in flamboyant Baroque manner while Rembrandt exhibited the spirituality of the Biblical characters through the illusory, mystical and abstract medium of light. And both these artist had employed the female form largely in their compositions rendered with alarming realism that attracted Doss to these seminal European masters.

The Christian Iconography

Though born into the religion of Christianity, Anthony Doss incidentally was a Christian. His approach and interpretation to retell Biblical themes especially of Christ's suffering was to emphasize the quality and character towards humanity - a theme that predominated in his works. It needs to be emphasized that deriving themes and subject matter from Christian stories was neither to politicize their religion nor to lay stress on its religiosity but largely provided iconographic diversity in exploring formal qualities. During the early 60s at the institution the nativist ideology was acquiring momentum and the committed teacher-artists and students alike were drawn in its vortex. Doss within this set up found the atmosphere charged to venture into artistic expressions that would make possible new directions related to regional specificity. The anguish and anxiety felt by the various artists in working towards innovative techniques and interpretation of themes and motifs channalized their creative energies through diverse

iconographies. Doss following in the footsteps of his senior colleagues settled to mediate his expression in art through subjective interpretation of Christ's life that marked it as dominant topos. In progressing towards this he evidently selected poignant moments of suffering experienced by its main protagonist the Christ as well other various biblical characters.

As he explored the Christian iconography he facilitated the process through an art language that was rooted in regional vocabulary. The images of Christ and Virgin or other characters from the Bible were configured on the models of the forms of the folk arts of the region of Tamil Nadu especially from Kumbhakonam. The wooden toys of this area with their simple forms and shapes, the large staring eyes, the reductive features attracted Doss to transcribe his ideas through it. Doss in exploring his art language through Christian iconography was lending another dimension to artistic expressions within the Madras Group. There have been artists within this group like Paniker, Santhanaraj, Alphonso, Dhanapal and Janakiram who also have explored the humanist themes from Bible. For Paniker his biblical derivatives were within the post-partion discourse, to confront anguished occurrence suffered by humanity at a particular moment in country's history. For Santhanaraj the themes and subject matter purely served to explore the formal elements, a point of reference as well to precipitate his subjectivity. It also connoted a secular outlook to delve into non-Indian or indigenised religious material. Jamini Roy had extensively used Christian motif similarly as a point of reference without imbuing it with religiosity or spirituality.

Doss's sensitivity to life and his benevolent temperament related fluidly with least resistance to the dominant theme of Christ's suffering. This eventually became the crucial focus of his work. The idea of depicting human suffering as painted expressions was imbibed from Masters of European Renaissance art, particularly, Rembrandt van Rijn and Peter Paul Rubens. The spirituality of Rembrandt in art was celebrated through tenebrism the extreme contrasts of light play that created an ambience of mystery. It effectively enhanced the moment of spirituality through focus on heightened suffering that was accepted with deep resignation. Rubens paintings were characterized by exuberant use of colours and depiction of dramatic moments in biblical stories. Rubens celebrated life through its vibrant youth to channalize its verve and energy by visualizing it through the spirited and abundantly endowed female figures. These qualities of female forms also eminently described Doss's compositions. These dominant European influences Doss assimilated to script and shape his style. In selecting his motif for the composition, he attempted to delineate the heightened moments of suffering and pathos To focus

on these crucial dimensions he jettisoned the story-telling elements from his compositions that had characterized the works of the above-mentioned European masters. His works that successfully inflect this criticality were **Agony [Fig. 91], Christ with Crown of Thorns [Fig. 92], Compassion [Fig. 93]** and **With the Master.**

Anthony Doss in these works configured his sensibility through a primitive imagery, markedly simple with large fixed eyes that held pathos within. In these pictures for instance, **With the Master,** he employed Western architectural elements like e Stained Glass windows and the mystical quality of light translated through his indigenous/native experiences. Human sufferings, grief and pain nevertheless are universal and not limited to the color and density of any country be it Western or Eastern. Line was brought into the service to project the suffering, agonies, anxieties and tensions that also pushed formal qualities of design, patterning and decoration. His paintings of **Madonna and Child [Figs. 94, 95, 96 & 97]** rendered in oils demonstrate strength of patterning and a sense of design that have been closely associated with the Madras Art Movement. The Christian iconography replete with Indian character and feel was particularly observable in the bindi worn on the forehead by women. It should be pointed out that Christianity was an alien religion that like Islam found its foothold in India with the coming of British and other Europeans. Consequent to this, the proselityzation of Christianity on the native soil resulted in acculturation that the works of Doss reflect. In delineating the Biblical characters particularly the women, they have been regionalized in their sartorial attire and other related accessories. This was a significant dimension in modern Indian art demonstrated in the works of Jamini Roy, Paniker, Santhanaraj and other artists.

The Female Nude and Neo- Academic Realism

Anthony Doss's guru D.P. Roy Chowdhary who worked in academic realism left a lasting impression on him evidenced by the artist moving on this trajectory in late 70s and early 80s. his ability in having mastered perspective, foreshortening, modeling in light and shade and tonal modulations of color led him to the realization of this goal. The adaptation of this mode of compositional creations was a foregone conclusion with Raja Ravi Varma. The ascendancy of Aabanindranath Tagore in Bengal during the nationalist struggle had led to reviling and cryptic criticism about Ravi Varma's realistic body of works ultimately resulting in the condemnation of his works as 'kitsch'. But nearly a century later for Doss it was a conscious decision to work in this style metamorphosing to take on the label of Neo- Academic Realism.

Anthony Doss while working at the College of Arts and Crafts as a colleague of Paniker, Santhanaraj, Munuswamy and other senior artists had requisite exposure in diverse media and had experimented with varied stylistic modern formulae. His active participation that aided in establishing a trajectory for the Madras Art Movement was equally important. Despite these varied exposures becoming integral dimension of his artistic persona, he nevertheless remained undeterred by it and pursued the opposing trend of Neo-realistic style of painting in late 70s and early 80s. His versatility in controlling the element of line with its nuances of flowing graceful rhythm or sturdy construction of human forms or with hackneyed strokes to evoke emotions of compassion and benediction, Doss gradually morphed the same line into a mellifluous contours of the female form. His voyeuristic journey through the semi-nude female forms became his preoccupation that enabled him to revert to academic realism; a style that he felt a true artist never stops exploring. To achieve this, Anthony Doss playfully manipulated the oil medium to effect Neo-Realism, adventured through modeling and modulations of colours its tones and shades brilliantly capturing on canvas the physical presence of the nubile female forms.

Anthony Doss's large oeuvre is inhabited by these young sirens engaged in various self absorbing activities of gossip, playing music, going to the temple, working in the fields or preoccupied with her favourite pastime of adorning herself. In working towards this subject it lends support of analogy with the *alasa kanyas* portrayed languidly on the temple walls of Orissa and Khajuraho. These *kanyas* or maidens have similar preoccupations and by their appropriation in his art, Doss was inflecting traditional iconography within everyday situation to serve manifest role in defining 'Indian' modernism. In all his compositions - domestic and intimate, a thread of eroticism runs through subsumed in the demure glances, sensuous half open lips and their sartorial attire that effectively conceals and reveal sanitizing it. Further the eroticism of his works was enhanced by virtue of his artistry.

Eroticism in Indian art has had strong links between fertility, sexuality and auspiciousness that characterized ancient Hindu societies. The term erotic today is politicized as it is culturally conditioned defined as a concept that is ideological in nature. Modern art that we recognize and respond to as erotic was about power and supremacy of man over woman. In Indian art and literature female sensuality was obsessively celebrated. Numerous religious hymns graphically describe the physical beauty of the goddesses. The tradition of miniature paintings patronized by the Rajas in the Desert and Pahari kingdoms offered an overt measure of eroticism in the metaphor of the divine relationship between Krishna and Radha. This efflorescence was the

product of the subaltern Bhakti movement that energized the careers of many poets who were peasants and workers. The Bhakti Movement had a core of radical spirituality that scorned earthly power and rejected man made impositions of caste and creed axing in the bargain the hierarchal role of scriptural Brahmanism. Within this cultural practice the aesthetic of an Indian is that of a male high culture with the result that women were represented both as an object of the gaze and as part of the sacred. Indian poets like Kalidasa delighted in describing nubile beauties: 'slim, youthful with the eyes of a frightened doe, fine teeth and red lips like the bimba fruit, slim waisted, deep navelled, slowed down by the weight of the hips and bent by her full breasts. She is the best of her gender created by god'[50].

Anthony Doss's youthful women reflected this paradigm as canonized in poetry and aesthetics. Within the history of art, the female nude was not simply one subject among others, one form among many; it was the subject, the form. The female nude was the sign of those other, more hidden properties of patriarchal culture, which were possession, power and subordination. Moreover representations of the female nude created by male artists testify not only to patriarchal understandings of female sexuality and feminity, but they also endorsed certain definitions of male sexuality and masculinity.

Doss's representation partially reflected the notion of cultural consumption. This testified to the patronage of his works by elite socialites and others with similar inclinations of aesthetic 'gaze'. Doss believed that the charm of the woman was in her robust physique describing them as 'healthy' and outlined the sensuous contours in space as he describes the female body. He seems intoxicated with the opportunities provided by her swells, hollows and curves of the smooth flesh as they gracefully slide in and out to promote an image that he has fantasized. His women symbolically poised against elements of plenty - bananas, pomegranate, coconuts, mangoes and flowers - provide the metaphor of fecundity and abundance.

Doss's empiricist perception aided him in generating and bringing forth through his artistry the vacuous youthful forms through optical and tactile sense. The optical senses transmit immaterial colours and lights associated with intellect, the spirit or the imagination. The tactile on the other hand places one in contact with reality, imparting ideas of weight and solidity. The commingling of the optic and tactile creates the gaze connoting the intensity in which knowledge and pleasure mingle when beholding a work of art.[51]. Doss's works effectively brings forth this commingling of the optical and tactile critically reinforced by the earthy and sensuous deployment of warm

tones of reds, browns and ochres. The colours were modulated and toned to create an alluring ambience. The tactile qualities were discernible in the textural rendering of sartorial attire resplendent with the sheen and richness of the heavy silks that draped the forms. Juxtaposing this was the richness of the jewellery that complemented the fresh skin tones. This brought alive the finely worked precious and semiprecious stones in its traditional designs and patterns. Doss's pictorial syntax with elements of tonal modulations, linear playfulness, spatial arrogation and textural liveliness animate his central themes and focuses interest on it. Beyond the subtleties that characterize his artistic statements, the sheer innocence of his female compositions reveal a dominant streak of romanticism that is the artist's mindset. As he relates, ' I love the female figure. Without loving it, I could not have created the hundreds of nudes whose pulsating vitality has not been an offering to the desires of man, but a tribute to the Eternal Woman who has always fascinated me. To me the woman appears as the great enchantress and in creating her bewitching form, I have filled her with feminine grace and beauty...The woman of my art can never lose her freshness, her youthful though mature charm.'[52]. Munuswamy has also echoed these sentiments in deploying the female form to facilitate his abstraction. While for Munuswamy the female form gradually lost its sensuality and erotic powers he used it to solve his problematic space ensconcing it as an object **[Figs. 98, 99 & 100]**.

Doss nevertheless had experimented with modernist formulae where he attempted retrenching the three-dimensional space and the corporeality of the mass to singularly use the element of line for his expressive purpose of rendering nudes. This stage was primarily at that particular moment when Doss along with his colleagues and students was involved in the indigenising process within the Art Institution. As Doss slowly maneuvered himself out of the modernistic formulae and expressions [two dimensional space and non corporeality] to strategically take up academic realism as his main forte, he vehemently defined his style and defied contemporary needs to flow with the mainstream. According to him, 'I am concerned only with academic realism as it testifies to my life where I delight in the corporeal and the material that is an inherent aspect of the young mature woman'[53]. Generously manipulating the line as gentle curves he brought alive the sensuality that made nubile female alluring and bewitching. As they languorously recline becoming the object of gaze where temporality becomes frozen into timelessness. These are realized in his works **Song of Love and The Garden [Fig. 101 & 102].**

He justifies his choice, claiming that academic style of painting requires mastering of the fundamentals in the enterprise of painting and like good wine, maturity of years of experience and

patience has enabled him to become adept in his creations. He maintains that it is a labor of love, his passionate involvement with the subject and his affinity with the oil medium [he uses no other] that generates interest and sustains him.

Today Anthony Doss continues to paint in the same vein and the same subject of the enticing female form. Leading a retired life, he has stopped showing at exhibitions. His paintings find favour with women of Chennai who form the crux of his clientele. They belong to leading industrial families and others with interest in art. The charming sirens mute in their responses to the vagaries of life will continue to be dominated by the male protective patriarchy and power of subjugation. May be the women clientele share a kindred spirit with the inhabitants of his canvases or/and perhaps it is the eternal beauty of the woman forever beckoning to a status part sacred part the all pervading shakti. Within the cultural practice where globalization, information technology, and varied genres like installation art, video art, performance arts etc. call the shots, Anthony Doss blissfully continues to paint his naiveté's to find his creative fulfillment in them. Nevertheless in a market driven economy where production and consumption were vital components, connoisseurs in a capitalist society consumed his products.

K. RAMANUJAM [1941-1973] SURREALIST IMAGERY AND DREAMS OF FANTASY

K. Ramanujam's **[Fig. 103]** pictorial vision was exemplary. His works were a translation of his fantasy; oneiric representations and dream scripts that was apart in its visual language from the others within the group. There have been very few artists who have explored the unconscious with its repertoire of fantasy and dreams as Ramanujam. He saw reality and the dreams, consciousness and unconsciousness as indissolubly linked **[Fig. 104, 105, 106 & 107]**. His external reality was romantically manifested in the surreal world populated with hybrid and the bizarre creatures. This was not a conscious venture of artistic exploration, as one would interpret it in the domain of Surrealist vocabulary and formulae. In the case of Ramanujam what set him apart from normal human being was that he was an artist who was born retarded. His speech was indistinct and his comprehension dismally low. Despite obvious handicaps there was one region within his mind that had the potency to over ride all these limitations and made him rise above. This faculty was his sharp perception of the environment and the people internalized through shortcoming of his speech delivery.

Ramanujam found a haven in College of Arts and Crafts under the nurturing supervision of K.C.S. Paniker. His talent for drawing was noticed by a relative who brought him to the

institution and left him in the care of Paniker who was then the Principal. Under the nurturing care and guidance of Paniker and S.Dhanapal at the institution, Ramanujam learnt to creatively explore various painting media like oils and watercolours to suit his temperament.

The creative ambience of the campus enabled Ramanujam to find his direction that simultaneously was nurtured by Paniker and Dhanapal among other senior artists. Alphonso Arul Doss who was a class fellow of Ramanujam recalls the work ethic that Ramanujam had developed unconsciously because of his handicap. He was a prolific painter according to Alphonso because he had no other distractions and the nurturing attitude of Paniker made him work in this way to gain confidence and prove his capabilities to his teacher. Recalls Alphonso, "everyday Ramanujam would come with a role of oil paper under his arm from Pallavaram [suburb of Chennai] and he would sketch and paint untiringly in the classroom either with the live model provided for anatomical study or the still life study. In the afternoons he would travel to peripheral areas of the city and observe the life of the rural people and sketch them. These sketches he would transform them into oil paintings or watercolours"[54]. As mentioned by many artists he would sell these paintings for a pittance so that he could meet his daily material requirements. The students on the campus would purchase them and prime it again to use it as their own canvases. Perhaps if these works of Ramanujam had not been treated as rubbishy slough may be it would have provided insight to his working method and process. While at the institution the working method was predominantly academic realism to render still life, landscapes, human figures and the rural scapes with its activities.

The Cholamandal Interlude

Paniker when he founded the Cholamandal Artist Village in 1966, Ramanujam was also made the founder member though financially his contribution was nil. As Nandagopal recollects, "it was the helplessness of a talented and creative artist handicapped like he was, that set my father [Paniker] thinking about a co-operative venture like Cholamandal"[55]. Ramanujam moved to Cholamandal along with other artists and within the ambience of this serene and idyllic locale his art probed new dimensions particularly from the inner recesses of his mind and the subconscious. His personal vision took on an intensification that was a visual translation of thought and language. Because of his disability to communicate, he became a voracious reader devouring any magazine or reading material that fancied his interest. Chandamama the children's magazine he read avidly and was interested equally in film magazines. He would also visit film studios and

had internalized the magic mythical realities of the sets that soon marked their presence within his works.

Ramanujam as a person was unsure and lacked confidence, but amazingly his artistic creations were self-assured. The bold lines, intricate patterns, minute details, hybrid imagery, strong colour modulations, mythic magic ambience appropriated with soft tonal washes of ink and the characteristic self-portrait with jaunty hat and a natty moustache became the salient characteristics of his works. **[Figs. 108, 109, 110, 111 & 112]** At Cholamandal surprisingly Ramanujam turned to ink drawings and washes using colored inks to obtain his color effects. Says Gopinath, "Ramanujam's involvement with drawing was so intense and involved that Sultan Ali after he settled at Cholamandal took to drawing inspired by him"[56]. It also inspired young Douglas who was fresh at the Village by the intensity of Ramanujam's working process.

It is not difficult to relate Ramanujam's works to surrealistic imagery though the ideology was dissimilar. As a person inflicted with mental disability and surrounded by normal people amongst whom he spent his time, he would have undergone tremendous anxieties, tensions and pressures to be accepted by them. And to this end he also changed his personality as accounts given by various artists testify. He learnt to smoke, wear western outfits and also took to consuming non-vegetarian fares [he was an orthodox Brahmin]. But despite these cosmetic changes in his personality he remained at the margin of the community and unleashed his creative energies in his work.

Surprisingly at the Artist Village, Ramanujam unlearnt his academics and evolved his imagery like a child. He would stretch a large sheet of paper on the ground and start working from one corner and build up the space with pictorial design conveying images of hybrid forms part snake part lion, flying forms, exotic architecture, and nature in convoluting organic articulations. **My Dream World [Fig. 113]** is rendered in pen and ink wash with grand theatrical architecture reminiscent of Roman buildings which had characteristic round arches and incomparable spaces to proclaim their authority. The sketch appears like a tableau in a dream world in which the grand procession is in progress. Continuing the oneiric imagery the horses peculiarly have four pairs of legs with a riders carrying banners. A magnificent chariot drawn by hybrid-morphed animals has features like a winged snake serving as an extended roof. Like the Surrealists, Ramanujam has employed academic realism to carry forth his imagery on a picture plane that has the distinctions of the foreground, middleground and the background. Typically and

conventionally as the surrealists had delved into the historicity of Renaissance technical apparatus, this similarity is invoked in Ramanujam's work. A one-point perspective gives authority to his vision in which the sequential play of time and space has no meaning. Adding to the surreality is the profusion of rich patterning on round arches and domed vaults juxtaposed with patches of smudged ink washes that enhances the dream like quality. The dominant line which he has effectively employed to recreate the dream world is amazingly sure especially in the delineation of architecture and the organic design that manifests its surface. Ramanujam has used his line in a painterly manner to create with its density, areas of contrasting light and shade. His whole picture surface comes alive with titillating visual textures as a result of his remarkable and creative use of line.

Ramanujam as his young years advanced became romantic at heart yearning for a companion to fill his lonely hours. His pen and ink drawing **Built Great Mansions to her Glory and from their Roofs the Vines of the Earth reached for the Heavens [Fig. 114]** is a work that is sensuously organic with lines metaphorically implicating female forms. To the right lower corner is a two-wheeled vehicle, in which, the artist is seated, recognized by his typical hat and a moustache. This ink drawing was done in 1973, the year he died at the age of thirty-three. In assigning such titles Ramanujam was also narrating his fantasy. It perhaps was also a premonition of his death and the unfulfilled wish for a life companion deeply marked in his psyche and made to become redemptive here. According to Nanadagopal, "Ramanujam would narrate these stories in Tamil to my father which would be translated as titles for his works". All his stories had the same theme, "In a land there was a king and queen. And a beautiful princess..."[57]. What inexplicably comes through in his works is the emotion of fear and loneliness, something he could not combat and had to live with. In conflating his magic realities, dreams, myths and fictions as concepts of his works he was reworking images drawn from film posters, tales of mythology and especially the varied objects picked up by his probing sensitivity as sea shells, dried leaves etc. His intricate designs and rich patterning came from his observation and studies of everyday and found objects that caught his imagination.

Ramanujam's works largely mark a different trajectory from the mainstream of the Madras Art Movement, that which can be read as the polemics within it though unintentional. Here was an artist who was living a life metaphorically through his creations. Ramanujam's unbridled imagination and the power of his visualization were the salient features of his artistic productions. He was able to sell his works that were largely promoted by Paniker. George Bucher a critic of

the Arts Council of Great Britain noticed his works and selected a few to be displayed at the Commonwealth Arts' Festival. He participated in various state, national and international exhibitions and was awarded important commissions. His last works remained unfinished. One of his unfinished pictures allegorically represent an elephant with a trunk raised in salutation and another with Romulus and Remus with huge she wolf. Perhaps in these works Ramanujam was bidding adieu to this world in the metaphor of salutation and the myth of Romulus and Remus inflect the nurturing ambience that Cholamandal provided for him in the persona of Paniker and S. Dhanapal.

Ramajujam's Oeuvre: A Critique

Within the Madras Art Movement the works of Ramanujam are of special significance. His style was intensely personal that gave no links or clue to the outside world. He was a fascinating mixture of naivete, innocence and seemingly humourous in parodying his self- portrait. He combined a strange imagination with a way of seeing, that was magical, sharp and direct. The hybrid forms were morphed from his unbridled imagination to take their place on the picture surface. The internalization of the empirical experiences during his days at the Art Institution enabled him to make a stockpile of its repertoire in his imagination. In his paintings with fantastic titles – **Time stood still, full with our love, and a hand like the lotus propped me up amidst the stars [Fig. 115]** – the colours have discordant notes in which the strident primary colours of reds and blue dominate. The organic world of nature with its leaves and flowers furtively inhabit his canvas. These works bear similarity with Marc Chagall in their extreme fantasy of his dream world. At the same time there is naiveté in the colored drawing and the rendering of the form. All the elements in his works are treated frontally, in profile and flat. Every form in nature and architecture was drawn with painstaking details – the accretive approach intuitively used by Ramanujam. The mood in his works was overpoweringly vibrant, with excitement in the activities though tinged with a feeling of melancholy.

Ramanujam's motifs were embroidered from the Tamil mythological film genre in which the hovering presence of his own persona in top hat striding confidently through a miniature city of onion domes and Garuda winged edifices produce an atmosphere of melancholy and a mood of levity. This polarity bounds all his compositions, as they are vignettes or moments of wish fulfillment. Essentially private mythologies, the artist's alter ego rides a winged dragon across the moon creating baleful actors in an intimate comedy. Ramanujam vacillated between fantasy and contemporary themes. As an expressionist Ramanujam build towards symbolic realities that

addresses the daemons of memory **[Fig. 116]**. Partha Mitter sums up Ramanujam works when he states that "he creates an imaginary 'bricolage universe made up of hetrogenous elements – architectural constructions, Tamil Gods, sacred animals, children's books and snatches from the French Impressionists"[58].

ALPHONSO ARUL DOSS [1939-] LIGHT AS FORM

Alphonso **[Figs. 117, 118 & 119]**constitutes one of the core members of the group of modern generation of artists within the Madras Art Movement along with A.K. Adimoolam, R.B. Bhaskaran, S.G. Vasudev, C. Dakshinamoorthy, P. Gopinath and S. Nandagopal among many others. An Art Educationist and an academician he was honoured with a Cultural Doctorate from World University, Arizona, U.S.A. in 1995. In 1997 he retired as the Principal after serving the Institution in that capacity for five years [1992-1997].

The Beginnings

A first generation Catholic convert, Alphonso was born and baptized in Bangalore, where he studied at St. Joseph's Indian High School [for there was a section exclusively for the British]. His talent for drawing was noticed by his teacher Mr. Krishnamurthy who advised him to join the Madras School of Arts and Crafts. With supportive and encouraging parents, Alphonso joined the art institution in 1956 and graduated in 1962 with a Diploma in Painting. His years spent at the Institution under the headship of Paniker moulded and developed his artistic vision and persona. Recalling his days spent at the campus Alphonso says, "a conducive atmosphere for self-evaluation prevailed in the college during my days as a student there. Paniker was of course the guiding spirit. Serious and involved artists like Santhanaraj, Munuswamy and Dhanapal exercised progressive ideas and experimented with modern materials. While they created an image for themselves, they shared with the students the problems and potentials that helped them to discover themselves. Working with these artists who can be termed as first generation of modern artists in the South, I grew up to discover my own way."[59].

His pedagogy at the Institution, that nurtured intellectual autonomy, opened up paths for discovering European masters, who held great fascination for him. These included especially Caravaggio, Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt Van Rijn, and Vermeer of Delft. The commonality among these painters was the exploration of the elusive element of light. Caravaggio's tenebrism was essentially manipulated for material realization of everyday subject or representation of religious texts through this intangible medium. Rubens had explored light celebrating the joys of

the world through the sensuous play of it on the youthful nubiles. Rembrandt's manifest spirituality was negotiated through the contrasts of light and shade, which expressed poignantly the suffering humanity in their most fragile moments. Vermeer's use of optical light demonstrated the material possibility of defining the visuality of his subject matter.

These varied negotiation of an ephemeral element by such diverse masters aroused his interest. In the study of this particular element it was to become for him a life long obsession and passion. But he soon shifted his emphasis from European artists to the traditional Indian canonical and folk art forms when he was given a cultural scholarship to study painting. His travels took him all over the country that brought him an awareness of Indian pictorial tradition in both miniatures and murals. His interest however went beyond stylistic influences to explore and venture into techniques that were to become his hallmark.

Exploration of Materials and Techniques

The free and exploratory ambience at the Art Institution made it possible to be adventurous with respect to use of materials and technique. This is where Alphonso was very successful working in an environment of healthy inquiry nurtured at the institution by various senior artists-teachers. Alphonso recalls, "an artist very involved in developing European techniques was Santhanaraj and he introduced the encaustic medium using wax as a medium for painting that allowed textures to become dominant."[60]. Alphonso experimented with various supports from canvas to jute to ordinary cotton cloth that he primed with local material like vajram [boiled animal horns] because it has a textural quality. Soon he became adept at the manipulation of various materials and his confidence grew in working with them and using it. And he moved on from oils, water colours and tempera to these new territories of technical adventure. Alphonso had closely studied the traditional murals at Pattishvaram [near kumbhakonam], Sittanavasal, Thanjavur, Srirangam, Madurai and Kerala. In addition he had also scrutinized the palm leaf manuscripts. It was the Indian techniques that held his interest. But simultaneously what fascinated him was also the Egyptian papyrus painting, Greek paintings, Pompeii murals, Chinese and Japanese water colours and Russian encaustic icon paintings.

A thorough study of these numerous diverse techniques especially from ancient civilization gave him an insight into the use of transparent tones and colours to create varied effects. This was in direct contradistinction to modern European methods where thickly loaded brush strokes characterized the works. Through a process of trial and error Alphonso arrived at his own

technique developed with transparent colours in thin washes. D.P. Roy Chowdhary had carried the legacy of Abanindranath Tagore's wash technique, now usefully interpreted to suit individual demands in different media. He also reiterates this further with Indian pictorial traditions in murals and miniatures. A step in this direction marked his Indian sensibility.

An open mind and a sensitive approach gave Alphonso the exposure that he required as a student. The investigation from technique led him to exploring regional/nativist forms particularly from the folk and tribal arts. Says Alphonso, "the influence of Indian art and civilization superseded my earlier exploration of new horizons in European modern art and I broke away from the Western fold to create paintings distinctly my own"[61]. His independent mindset rebelled against any prescribed or standardized formulae. Paniker before he brought an awareness of reworking traditional art forms was insistent that students explore modern European styles, particularly Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Cubism and abstraction. Paniker criticized Alphonso who preferred earth and muted colours with advice to paint and draw directly from life. He resisted these overtures of his teacher feeling that his colours were numinous a thing in themselves more imaginative without describing any material life. It was not only Paniker but Munuswamy also advised him to break out of the mould of painting religious themes interpreting the life of Christ or Buddha or Gandhi **[Figs. 120, 121, 122, 123]**. Alphonso in reacting and opposing these stalwarts was beginning to define his territory and emphasized his artistic autonomy through his personalised interventions. **[Fig. 124]**

Semantics of Spiritual dimension

Alphonso's lineage from a family of devout Christians had instilled in him an awareness of biblical stories leading to a preoccupation and fascination with its chief protagonist Christ. The life of Christ held deep semantics for him believing strongly to be a universal dimension and not particularized to Christianity only. By this interpretation he was setting forth an argument about humanizing values inherent not only in Christianity but as stressed in all religions. For Alphonso the suffering of Christ was a metaphor implying universal phenomenon symbolizing the fate of every human irrespective of caste or creed. This sacrifice by one human being was indexical to his message of love, forgiveness, humility and universal brotherhood that finds greater relevance today. Alphonso negotiated his creativity through abstract values of these emotions. His expressions in art were primarily realized through his figures as he was predominantly a figurative painter and emphasizes, "I am neither realistic nor abstract"[62]. He reinforces his position within the Madras Group by his trenchant attitude of visualizing forms through

traditional art imagery, since it strengthened his ideology "of one born of the soil will communicate it through such a mindset". In this respect whatever be the subject the strength of his indigenous vision translated his subjectivity. Like Paniker, Santhanaraj and Anthony Doss, the transcription of the image of Christ in local vernacular form marks it as regional. The acculturation of a foreign religion on the native soil is hybridized, as various indigenous elements co-opt to make it acceptable. Consequently, Alphonso optimized his Indianness when he cast his spiritual imagery with native characteristics of the folk art forms. He attempts to speak through his art the spirit of India, capturing gestures, moods and behavior patterns of people. **[Figs. 125, 126 & 127]**

His painting **Christ Preaching [Fig. 128]** could be read as a satire or a parody on the nativist agenda pushed by his teachers. But at a more direct level is a translation of traditional iconography inscribing the image with attributes relating particularly to teaching or giving a sermon. The dominant centrality of the composition is its articulate line that defines the meditative downcast eyes and ringlets manifesting as beard, moustache and the hair. The element of line seemingly bears the weight of local character translated for decorative stylization. Reinforcing the linearity was the iconic frontality and the sensuous curves derived from wooden toys and terracotta. The same curves echo in the nostrils, eyebrows and the lines on the palm of the hand. The shifting cubist planes have been deployed in delineating the nose and drapery. Though a regional bias characterize his works Alphonso resisted the prosetylization by Paniker. Alphonso argued that we are of the soil nurtured in it and hence part of our personality, so where is the need to go to the local cultures to bring about a radical change in the approach to painting. In other words culture is part of our inherited and inherent mental make up and occasioned no valorization of their forms to make them visible. His arbitration with colours bears the same specificity and resemblance to the Indian mural tradition that favoured earth colours as muted browns, olive green, turmeric yellow, Indian red, ultra marine blue and greys and black that was compatible with his austere vision.

His sensitivity responds to contingent human demands of dispassionate, mindless, barbaric and heinous human acts. This type of reaction, grounds him perceptually, in the cultural matrix, which gives valency to human issues. His preoccupation with abstract concepts of faith, peace, terrorism, communal strife, political malpractices, corruption etc. informs his subject matter.

These paintings validate personal experiences, through his subjective mapping. It foregrounds his aesthetics developed through particularized repertoire of his visual language. In freely employing these subsumed political dimensions to become the vehicle for his expression. Alphonso was not committing himself to any prescriptive political ideology or affiliations. It predominantly remained his response to insensitive and heinous crimes perpetrated by human beings on each other. For the artist it engendered a process of catharsis allowing him to make these statements that remain apolitical.

Alphonso's works also have the preponderance of the theme of compassion or peace, which he mediated with iconic symbols of historical personas like Gandhi and Christ or a metaphysical concept of the dancing Nataraja **[Figs. 129, 130 & 131]** in its dual role as a creator and destroyer. In deploying these he attempts not only secularization by divorcing them from religious connotations but also denotates to inflect his philosophy that infinitely is to project universal peace and harmony. His Christian religious principles entrenched within the subconscious emotionally colours artistic ideas through concepts of duality. This duality references war and peace, harmony and discordance, triumph of good over evil. This mode of conceptualization by Alphonso bears affinity with the works of Paniker whose oeuvre could be categorized as regional and national. But in the case of Alphonso he mediated through the religion not for a regional emphasis and hence goes beyond to negotiate the national space. The density of his graven images thick with veiled meanings is implicated in symbols and signs. These are the ubiquitous forms of the fish, lamp, bird **[Fig. 132]** and fire [common to Christianity and Hinduism] that effortlessly enable interpretation. Through these means Alphonso has reinscribed iconography on his own terms. His depth of the knowledge of Christianity in tandem with philosophy of Hinduism and Buddhism posits him as an artist who can traverse freely across both spheres with these symbols to contextualize his works within a cultural milieu marking it as individual as well universal.

Light as Form

In the late 70s Alphonso having evolved his personal idiom in painting that successfully combined Indian pictorial tradition with stylistic modern European derivatives of cubism and German Expressionism now ventured forth to explore the intangible element of light as a dominant form in his works. Light had been an element that had fascinated him from his childhood days when he attended Sunday mass in a Gothic church, which had stained glass windows. Alphonso internalized the play of light on the colored glass. "Unconsciously", says

Alphonso "I have been drawn towards light. Wherever there was light I was drawn towards it and when there was inspiration I though that was light"[63]. The study of light academically pursued through works of Renaissance Masters and the Impressionists, led him eventually to interrogate it, realizing that light as an element of artistic investigation has epic dimensions. Of the numerous artists within the Madras Art Movement it was Alphonso's radical vision as also Santhanaraj's that made possible the negotiation of this ephemeral element beyond its physical reality.

Beginning with the macro concept of sun he reduced it to the micro symbol of luminosity in the lamp as an inveterate symbol in his works. Alphonso's interest in the study of sun as a vital force among the Dravidians led him to travel extensively in South India. Says Alphonso, "I could not, but think of the Dravidians, as a wise, ancient race who attributed everything that happened in the nature and on earth to the sun from which concept emanated the all powerful Sun God, the Sun Festival and the all significant Sun symbol"[64]. Alphonso traveled through the country studying Sun temples in Northern India as well in the South. During his travels he mingled with the rural folks and participated in the sun and fire festivals, which were ritualistic purification. Alphonso investigated the forms of traditional symbols of light coded in various rituals, intuitively evolved to serve their purpose. His scientific temper led him to pursue the rationale in present day technology by conferring with astro-physicists and scientists who explicated the properties of light. "Slowly I began to see the correlation between the belief of the olden days and the scientific truths about the power of the sun as proved by modern research and technology and recognized the value of light and how to link it with my art"[65].

Alphonso having rationally and intuitively studied the properties of light now ventured forth to translate it materially into his artistic expressions. He used codified signs as lamp or metaphysical concept of Nataraja with its aureole of *prabhavali* or light to disseminate or create the universe. In order to project these symbols he developed an innovative technique that would to be a salient mark of Alphonso's style within the Madras art Movement. Through mediation with invented and innovative technique in rendering light, Alphonso manifested his ideologies that conflated his notion of light with profound humane thoughts. This invented technique was what he conclusively inferred from his study of the refraction of light through various gems. In observing and studying the refraction of light he deduced a contrast of white with the refracted color. Capitalizing on this contrast he invented his technique. In this he played upon the transparency of colours building them up with thin brush strokes; leaving the primed white of the

canvas untouched but brushed with gel that provided the luminosity and fixed his transparent brush applications. Technically in transcribing this ephemeral phenomenon to the material level, he manipulates the white of the support [canvas] to reflect brilliantly the blotches or calculated patches of colours to underscore his artistic vision. Majority of his works employ monochrome scheme that he creatively controls with stark brilliance of the white of the canvas **[Fig. 133]**. His preference for transparent colours that is intensely Indian in character situates Alphonso within the mainstream of regional as well as the broader canvas of the national milieu. This clearly defied the authority of Paniker who maintained that regional bias could be materially reflected only through its varied art forms.

A. S. Raman commenting on the artist themes has this to say, "Alphonso's art comes alive because it represents a happy confluence of healthy influences –Renaissance masters, Impressionists, Cubists, Ajanta, Chola bronzes, folk art – the undercurrent being provided by his own involvement in a spiritual quest of great intensity. He also paints Hindu subject with great fervour. He feels drawn to them both emotionally and spiritually, though he considers himself a dedicated and deeply religious Christian. To him Siva and Shakti are fertility symbols; Krishna personifies the concept of universal love and Nataraja as the epitome of all the elemental forces of nature and lingam as the most powerful abstraction of the fertility cult. His Ravana is one of the finest examples this genre. Alphonso relates Ravanna's personality to a wheel, the symbol of motion and speed"[66]. It served to portray not only a mythological personality but as a metaphor of strength and power.

Alphonso when compared with Anthony Doss was more intensely involved with his Christian faith, and his attitude and approach to religion was more on a philosophical and spiritual plane. Christ for the artist was a symbol of tolerance and compassion. Says Alphonso, "the structural meaning of my paintings is closely linked with my life and objectives. The expression is purely psychological. The themes are intimately woven into the fabric of my personal feelings reflecting power and variety"[67]. Alphonso pictures served no didactic purpose and served primarily to precipitate his spirited ideology through an intangible medium of light. His experimental approach, his intellectual curiosity, the scientific rationale in exploring the properties of light, his intuitive understanding of traditional religious signs and symbols mark out Alphonso the artist with a dynamic temperament.

Despite his spiritual adventures transcribed as aesthetic individual statements, Alphonso clearly remains within the parameters of the Madras Art Movement. The question that crops up is what qualifies him as a nativist. It is the artist's strong belief that every individual is inherently inscribed with his cultural signs, absorbed and within his subconscious that allows a negotiation of his artistic expression within that space. It is this attitude that made him reject Paniker's ideology of 'only' sourcing and researching local or regional 'tradition'. Because for Alphonso his predilection towards arbitration of regional art forms was an inherent aspect of his personality since he was grounded in the aesthetics of that culture and its inherent forms came naturally to him as part of collective unconscious. So one need not set paradigms to become an indigenists. His dominant figural iconography was derived from local folk art forms studied with academic intensity to translate creative urges It was his practice to travel to peripheral regions of the city and to interior rural areas and study the local crafts, which he would translate as his aesthetic statements.

The local craft traditions that Alphonso studied made a deep impact on his imagery, fascinated as he was by the organization of its naïve and strident simplicity of forms. In interrogating these diverse local craft forms Alphonso was making an intervention as a modernist from within his socio-cultural milieu. Some of his drawings especially the human forms executed during his tenure as an art teacher at Kumbhakonam College of Arts reflect this study. These drawings of human faces derived from the locally manufactured wooden toys have primeval quality in their stark simplicity and rendering of certain features especially the eyes **[Fig. 134].** As Alphonso commented "we were looking towards Picasso in his largely distorted native African masks to draw our inspiration. But the same is here at our doorstep. It is for us to explore and exploit it according to our creativity. And this drawing precisely reflects it"[68]. The line of Alphonso imparts a personalized quality rhythmic and decorative to configure the figure and the form. **[Figs. 135, 136 & 137]**

Alphonso in his prolific output was not alienated from his socio-politico-cultural milieu. His intense sensitivity made it possible to translate his sensations and experiences through artistic statements in whatever sphere to make his comment as a responsible artist towards his society. He continues to paint and exhibit with his personally evolved style to also reflect the nuclear age and its accompanying pending disasters in his recent exhibitions.

R.B. BHASKARAN [1942-] CONCEPTS AS PICTORIAL ORGANIZERS

"I want to be entirely personal in terms of color, space and concept".

R.B. Bhaskaran

Bhaskaran **[Fig. 138]** who formed one of the core members of the group of students with Paniker was a rebel with an aggressive personality. His student days at the College of Arts and Crafts were most productive when he had an opportunity to interact, participate and debate the issues of nativism. However Bhaskaran with his independent mind and approaches could not cater to the ideas of his teacher Paniker and rebelled against it. He was also one of the founding members of the Cholamandal Artist Village but soon parted ways because his creative and restless mind would not permit any categorization in artistic conceptualization as 'nativist' or 'regional' and left the village to take up residence in the city and the profession of teaching at the College of Arts and Crafts in 1969.

Bhaskaran could be classified as one among the great artist teachers who left an indelible impression upon his students. Says Achuthan, "Bhaskaran could tap potential creativity and was never interested in producing clones"[69]. Boasts Bhaskaran "I have the capacity to identify talent and encourage the student to push ahead according to his individuality"[70]. His place within the Madras Group is influential and seminal. Unable to fall in line with the native agenda set by Paniker he termed his artistic productions of 60s as 'pseudo-Indian' **[Fig. 139]**. It is the polemics of the nativist agenda that gave the Madras Group its heterogeneous character. According to Bhaskaran, "my teacher taught that Indian artists painting should look Indian and as long as I was the student I painted with motifs of trishul. Snake etc"[71]. Paniker who despite differing ideologies continued to be an authoritative and influential teacher but students like Bhaskaran were questioning this intangible reality termed 'Indianness' in the pictorial debate that was set in momentum by him.

Nativist VS. Universal Subjectivity

Bhaskaran's early works are notated with signs from traditional symbols like the snake, trishul and goddess **[Fig. 140]**. The polemics generated within the artistic circle by the authoritarian persona of Paniker soon affected Bhaskaran. His rebellious mindset would not allow depiction of exclusive regional art forms. As long as he remained the student at the institute he aligned himself with the ongoing debate. After his graduation in 1966 from the Institution he introspected to create forms and imagery that would belie any reference to local art forms. The deep emotional commitment to art opened up possibilities to invest his energies from other

sources through which he could underpin his Indian sensibility. And Bhaskaran by moving beyond the polemical regional/nativist debate he explored his immediate social environment that became the point of reference in his works.

Bhaskaran could not reconcile to projecting 'Indianness' through symbols or mythical narratives instanced in the oeuvre of Redappa Naidu. He says, "How does a painting become Indian by symbols? Hindu does not belong to geographical boundaries of India alone it goes far beyond to Java and to Nepal so epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana are also picturised and sculpted there. How one can say that by depicting these epics the works becomes Indian. It's the way the painter reflects India it becomes Indian, using Indian themes not reproducing them"[72]. Bhaskaran's perspective on the artist's role is predicated on the universality, that is to say belonging everywhere transcending geographical boundaries and narrow parochial outlook. He does not color his artistic creations with regional but characterizes his statements as Indian with the artists' roots, sensibility, lineage and genealogy. Each artist according to Bhaskaran "carries his own volume of India in his works". He insists that his questioning of meaningful agendas either regional or 'Indianness' was not a posture of being skeptical or negative rather it served as an argument to further the process of intellectualization.

On the premise of these polemical arguments he nevertheless created works during 1968-70 that involved employing the Hindu iconography. **Muruga** a pen and ink drawing has the arrangement of the new images evolved from the traditional iconographic matrix with a modern sensibility. This implies a complete breakdown of traditional form interpreted and represented purely through decorative lines to identify as contemporary work. In this deconstruction Bhaskaran had the precedent of Redappa Naidu who had initiated this conceptualization with his Deity Series. Similarly **Symbols in Space [Fig. 141]** Bhaskaran ideationally has shaped an ambience of a sanctum in which the varied symbols with polyvalent meaning recreates the personalized iconography. It is to the problematic space that Bhaskaran gave his undivided attention as part of formal quality of his art. Compositionally for him organization of space was critical for all his forms and made an attempt to solve this through line and color. To find a solution for these formal elements has remained a central debate within the Madras Art Movement. And for Bhaskaran as for the others within the artistic circle he negotiated and situated these elements through his themes and subject matter.

Bhaskaran's attempts to move away from arbitrating regional forms needed an intervention. He worked towards this gradually evolving a framework, within which he could expiate his creative energies. In the late 60s this assumed the broad category he would characterize as procreation [cycle of birth, life and death] - a concept that still lives with him in his works through varied symbols and metaphors. This approach postured his independence within the group establishing his self-determined path. The formal elements of line, color and space were rigorously deployed to energise the metonymy with nature that aided in evolving his intangible and metaphysical dimension of creation **[Fig. 142]**. As analyzed earlier these elements were prioritized within the artistic circuit of the Madras Group to express form more than content. This was Paniker's ideology insisting on the aesthetics of the form to convey the 'Indianness' and hence the authenticity that would emerge from it.

His maturity as a painter was announced when he foregrounded his concerns that related primarily to his negotiation of space, which in the modernist reductive tradition would yield to decorative patterning, retrenching it of any three dimensionality. This debate within him emphasized the fundamental premise of evolving and integrating space for picturization and organization now completely preoccupied him. It is this polyvalence of the abstract element of space in conjunction with his equally abstract theme of evolution and life that Bhaskaran actively explored leading to a creation of a dialogue between the empty space of canvas and the artist.

Evolution and Life Cycle Series 1970s

Bhaskaran having identified his areas of interest moved away completely from the nativist argument to attempt definition of his artistic contours in which he allowed experiences to dictate the content in his art. Says Bhaskaran, "My paintings reflect what I am at this moment, how I understand life. It is the assimilation of the process of living which is the sum total of my painting"[73]. This was allowed to take shape in unexpected ways. For Bhaskaran unexpected implied the accidental and the emergent. And in this direction his series of 'Evolution' and 'Life cycle' are more in the nature of this unexpected and accidental phenomenon. This partially explains his interest in the intangibility involved in the process of life and creation. Forms became laden with emotions and meaning since they became symbols of concrete experiences. A passion to project experiences led him towards employing metaphors to realize his concepts.

Bhaskaran in these two series of 'Life cycle' and 'Evolution' is carrying forward the unique esoteric Indian tradition expressed through concepts of Siva and Shakti **[Fig. 143]** to convey

procreation fundamental to life process. Abstract ideas of this nature can be communicated through metaphors and Bhaskaran has generously derived these symbolic forms from nature especially the hills, seeds, fruits, plants, birds and trees **[Fig. 144]**. Nevertheless Bhaskaran clarifies emphatically that there is no question of sexuality or eroticism rather it is the simple idea of directly conveying the act of procreation in all life forms. But among the life forms he lays stress on the importance of man and woman who are accorded superior status in this hierarchy for existence.

The penchant for theme of procreation underpinning fundamental values of life cycle reflects a preoccupation with Existentialist philosophy obliquely Since Bhaskaran is concerned with individuality and uniqueness of subjective experiences; anxiety and ambiguity becomes his preoccupation, and his entire search was for a direct and spontaneous encounter with oneself. An encounter with oneself requires vitality and this was available in abundance with Bhaskaran. It translated metaphorically through movement; a bird in a state of preparedness for flight was verily potential movement, while a bird in flight was the realization of the movement. These multivalent dimensions of movement were explored by Bhaskaran as static birds or birds in flight.

Bhaskaran in **Life Cycle Series** effectively and strongly communicates the idea of creation through metaphors derived from nature. In **The Nurture [Fig. 145]** mountain forms are symbolically used, referencing the concept of nurture particularly related to the female form. The mountain has been transformed into a simple diagrammatic linear reinvention morphing from sensuous curves to cryptic triangles. Within a series of concentric triangles, Bhaskaran delineated a plant implicating the seed og growth. Interestingly all the triangles point down referencing to the female energy. His reductive ideas presented through economic juxtapositions of varied forms evoke playfulness but tightly woven into a composition that disallows extraneous elements to disrupt the visualization. These two series in their compositional organization and economical employment of line and colours evoke strong organic qualities **[Fig. 146 & 147]**. And this factor enhances the idea of movement as one in accordance with life, death and rebirth and the process continuing endlessly.

Identifiable dimensions of Bhaskaran's compositions were his naïve child like spontaneity that manifests the appearance of his canvases. But these however remain external manifestations of deeply thought out concepts. Bhaskaran says, "When I take the brush in my hand sometimes I do

not know what will be the first trace on the canvas. But once a beginning is made then the colours, lines and forms become the guiding force. A calculated stroke evokes a dialogue and the argument between the mind and the varied elements continues one leading to the other and the entire idea finally takes shape. But I find it difficult to say that I am finished with the work. When I return to the canvas after sometime I find certain areas calling for a shape or a form to be placed within the space. And this process continues till I am saturated and I decide that the painting is complete"[74]. A master draftsman in handling line Bhaskaran has used the emotional qualities of this versatile element to convey his sensitivity in this series. The line as a trace has a graffiti like quality and the arbitrary colours reinforce and complement it. Subsumed within this artistry was the artist's unique vision communicated through quasi abstraction not in its delineation of forms or shapes but metaphorically conveyed **[Figs. 148, 149 & 150]**.

Bhaskaran VS Cats

Themes in Bhaskaran's body of works are comparatively varied and those that give him an opportunity in solving his spatial problems. These include the series on Evolution and Life Cycle, cats, marriage portraits and presently still life. His **Cat Series** with which today Bhaskaran is identified followed his exploration of the series of 'Evolution' and 'Life cycle'. And curiously this gives him an identity all his own based on the feline creature. His very first attempt in painting this agile animal was a large canvas. The agility that this creature espouses parallels the artists mental make up. Speaking on his 'Cats' Bhaskaran says, "The cat for me is a form. I delineate forms, assimilate them and then generate a new form, and that's the cat. It is not a true cat as you might find in a photograph, but a visual rendition. The cat is in my mind. There is simplicity to the drawn line that is attractive. The cat is recognizable, but it is not a cat. I arrived at this through my own sketches"[75]. Bhaskaran by implicating an abstraction of the image is not appropriating its form rather attempts to simulate it, when he says, 'it is not a true cat as you might find in a photograph'. This is because his cats do not represent a particular pedigree rather it simply recalls the feline animal insinuating a form with certain order. Indirectly for Bhaskaran the cat also becomes a point of reference to explore the concept of form in terms of space. Undoubtedly these problematic privileged and conditioned his artistic statements largely.

Within modern criticism meaning of form either equals with subject matter, or the form becomes more important than content or vice versa. Or else there is unity of form and content. Arguably if it could be theorized that 'form' has a simple meaning, something like 'shape' and then a higher meaning like 'essence' the ambivalent notion of form, combining the visual representation

with the definition of the intelligible as nonvisual, provides justification as form in Bhaskaran's cats. Crucially the animal served only as a form as Bhaskaran clarifies, "I love to explore the possibilities of the cat. I find it a challenge to discover and re-discover elements I might have originally missed"[76]. Characteristically the 'Cat' emerges as an element a component or a constituent on his canvas translated as form through space kindled by the artist's whimsical imagination.

Bhaskaran's resourcefulness in representing the 'cat' was expressed powerfully through the medium of painting, drawing and prints **[Figs. 151, 152, 153, 154, 155 & 156]**. It also reflects his versatility, as he easily moved from one artistic discipline to another. His proficiency in the graphic medium was the result of intensive study he undertook for almost a decade from 1968 to about 1977 within the country and abroad. His initial experiences were in studying intaglio printmaking, lithography and ceramics under varied scholarships abroad. Eventually in mid 1970s at the College of Arts and Crafts he revived and ultimately headed the Graphic Art Department by introducing Diploma in Print Making. **[Figs. 157 & 158]**.

It becomes necessary at this juncture to trace the establishment and development of the print-making department within the institution[77]. D. P. Roy Chowdhary was the first artist to attempt creative expression in print making within the institution. K.C.S. Paniker's first dated print is a drawing belonging to the year 1954. The School had an excellent metalworking and engraving department with highly skilled engravers. These master craftsmen prepared the metal plates for Roy Chowdhary and Paniker, but otherwise their services were primarily directed towards producing craft wares and metal ware. Paniker in 1957 when he became the administrative head initiated the reorganization of the school. One important recommendation among many others was the commencement of the regular classes in graphic arts. The master engraver Kalyanasundram imparted training to students in lino-cut, woodcut, stencil, lithography, etching, engraving and silkscreen printing. Of the illustrious students the works of A. Paneerselvam, A.S. Jaganathan, Vardharajan and Akkitham Narayanan are notable. These artists had experimented with this medium and produced innovative works that were accepted within mainstream Indian modern art. The printmaking department thus started functioning actively under Paniker and artist A. Paneerselvam graduated with a diploma in engraving in 1965. In 1971 he applied for a post in the printmaking department but unfortunately was denied the opportunity due to play of internal politics. And the talented and dedicated artist was forced to take up an unrelated assignment elsewhere. After Paniker's retirement printmaking was marginalized as other issues

within the curriculum took precedence. Bhaskaran in 1970 took charge of the printmaking department of the college as desired by the then principal S. Dhanapal [father-in-law of Bhaskaran]. He recommissioned an old printing press at the college and set to work. He included printmaking in the curriculum and students could major in it. After his international exposure and working with leading contemporary masters Bhaskaran took the initiative of reviving and re-establishing the entire printmaking curriculum along international standards.

Bhaskaran's involvement with the graphic medium afforded an opportunity of exploring form, which enhanced his repertoire of visual language. Besides printmaking his attribution towards the conceptualization of the animal 'cat' as a pure form was also precipitated by his intense study of the neo-realists in Britain especially the works of David Hockney that 'suggested fresh and convincing ways with the image' [Josef James]. These forms, which were convincingly evolved, countered the 'expressive' figuration that was gaining valency in the 70s and early 80s. Apparantly Bhaskaran in his 'cat' series was incidentally employing the animal to project his aesthetics of the problematic space effectively realized with calculated efforts through line and colours. " The space in these pictures, is subtly divided by flat, tensely out-lined shapes of cats, potted plants, furniture, curtains and floor levels, that when set against a background of contrasting hues, divide the latter into independent shapes that assert their own identity."[78]. The shaped spaces are the reminiscences of the miniature Indian tradition merged with conventions of Abstract Expressionism.

Stylistically his 'Cat' series is linked with the **Marriage Photo [Figs. 159, 160 & 161]** series [1981] in continuing experiments with shapes and space. He recalls as to how he was inspired towards painting and making prints of this common and ubiquitous theme. Beginning with the wedding photograph of his grandparents in his home he studied the familial members objectively to configure in his works. Later he intentionally studied these marriage photographs in the houses he visited of his friends and acquaintances. Bhaskaran in pursuing this theme in his art was commenting on the social dimension of the institution of marriage. In the tradition of Bhupen Khakkar, Bhaskaran series apparently parodies the sanctimonious dimension of marriage. Like Khakkar, who had chosen the social motif of middle class strata in the city, Bhaskaran attempts to give substance of commonness to this ritual by making it into a witty narrative. Rescuing it from the banality of a photographed image, Bhaskaran by parodying calls attention to this social institution that brings together the two protagonists, through religion and astrological stellar configurations And the subtext of procreation is the concept, which has been privileged by the

artist in nearly all his statements beginning with Evolution and Life Cycle series now becomes an indirect centrality to keep the momentum of life cycle progressively active and moving. Bhaskaran said, "Whatever be the motif in my painting for me it is always the man and woman and procreation"[79]. His interest in the 'Marriage Photos' rapidly grew and armed with a scholarship he traveled all over the country to study this theme with its diverse culture, dress, religious and social functions and its related implications.

The 'Cat' and 'Marriage photo' series provide an interesting study to reflect on their contrast. While the 'Cat' is formal, tense and tautly sensual fixated on one motif [almost stands for his signature marking perhaps a clever marketing strategy] the latter makes a social comment. Bhaskaran's artistry undoubtedly is his tour de force especially in recreating the forms of not only the man and woman in 'Marriage Photos' but essentially in 'cat' series as well. In the latter series the animal is cast in all its typical postures of hunting, relaxing, tenseness, nervousness, slumbering, in conversation, snooping in alleys, majestically reposing in fields meditating the mountains or coiled in slumber. It should be reiterated at this juncture that cat as such was never a cherished icon in Indian iconography. So his glorification of cats is to be read as a departure from traditional values and marking the artist's posture towards the valourization of this particular animal within traditional context should be read as a sign of radicality and indifference. In significantly redirecting his energies towards the exploration of this feline form, Bhaskaran as an artist was inscribing his ideas in usefully employing a ubiquitous creature of the alley to be privileged over regional artistic vocabulary and its formal language. To take a detour from this insistence on indigenousness had possessed Bhaskaran since his split from Cholamandal Artist Village where he had been one of the founding members and with Paniker the patriarch whose authoritarianism Bhaskaran rebelled against.

In opposition to this, the 'Marriage Photos' compositionally are obviously stage managed with stereotypical postures – full faced or in profile. The motifs Bhaskaran evolves in his Marriage Photos were consequent to his extensive studies that eventually developed as series. But his symbols and motifs do not end with particular series but are carried over and dexterously amalgamated in the next. A case in point is the instance of the 'Marriage Photos' in which convincingly he incorporates the twin hills and the cat. Both the mentioned motif has sexual connotations directly related to procreation or reproduction. Cat is the phallic symbol and the twin hills associated with female breasts. It therefore envisages for Bhaskaran the prime function of man and woman to relate to procreation in his aesthetics of conceptualization. His various

series therefore flow into each other and serves to reinforce his artistic concepts and ideologies well.

In his 'Marriage Photos' he developed on his compositions and gradually pushed the protagonists at the edge of the frame to have the rest of the space intelligently and evocatively filled with interesting formations of line, shapes, and textures **[Fig. 162]**. This assumed the forms of vase of flowers, the implied bed with floral framework, or a horizontal band arranged with potted plant, the twin hills and the cat. For Bhaskaran it becomes equally critical to provide a play of opposites - the animate with the inanimate. He creates the tension between them to hold his composition with terseness and strength that is the mark of his style. His intense study of Indian miniature traditions and cave art paintings within the country intermingle together with the local regional art forms that inherently were part of his roots and genealogy. These traditions were a cultural baggage which he could not deny are interestingly assimilated to create decorative and patterned surfaces. This effectively is an answer to his space problematic with which he was constantly engaged and challenged his arguments on the picture surface.

Bhaskaran's decorative ornamenting comprised of squiggles of brushstrokes, terse and energetic dots, binding stripes, and caricatured or pictographic animal and human forms interspersed in a calibrated and calculated manner throughout the composition. Bhaskaran in his visual language has attempted to soften boundaries and projected his art as going beyond geographically identified contours and inscribed it with a form that is more global than 'Indian'. He transgressed these boundaries because he found the discourse of internationalism more compelling than the narrow parochial national or and regional outlook. This attitude finds an echo in the similarity of opinion expressed by Munuswamy who affirmed the modernist discourse if one has to consistently remain within the modernist paradigm.

Bhaskaran and his Ideologies in Art

Bhaskaran's stockpile of motif is derived from regional folk and tribal art form; cave art paintings and the classical pictorial and plastic art traditions of Southern dynasties. He employs the local art forms of pre-industrial era indirectly, that is, it is not a particular form or motif reinvented with modification rather he adapts its aesthetics in terms of simplicity, naivety, spontaneity and their child like approach. Bhaskaran working and developing his aesthetics and artistic vocabulary through 70s and 80s from within the institutional environment, which he joined as a

teacher in 1969, did not evolve nor generate any polemical arguments among his students nor developed a different trajectory of his approach to regional modern art movement.

Bhaskaran's ideologies nevertheless were not in full agreement with the nativist agenda initiated by Paniker that primarily had served as the springboard for his artistic career. 'Pseudo-Indian' assumed the form of subsumed rebellion and when cracks appeared with Paniker regarding legalities of property at Cholamandal Artist Village, Bhaskaran firmly moved away from all 'forms' of authoritarianism. This included parting ways with his teacher Paniker from Cholamandal Artist Village and in his pictorial creations axed the notion of regional or nativist reference. He took up a teaching career at the College of Arts and pursued his artistic profession with a different program.

With the establishment of Cholamandal Artist Village Paniker's notion was also to develop and evolve it as a closely integrated artistic community with shared ideas, common regionalized or nativist style and iconography. Since Paniker had also visualized starting a school parallel to the College of Arts and Crafts [Chapter III] with a similar structured curriculum, he wanted this to be an extension of it. However the school never materialized consequent to differences developing between the artists and the patriarch over legal squabbles and this dissipated Paniker's creative energies. Bhaskaran in deciding to take up a teaching profession at the art institution realized the numerous advantages associated with it. He was freed from rhetoric of nativism, liberating him towards autonomy of developing his visual content. These polemical dynamics of carrying the burden of a programmatic agenda would no longer bind him at the institution, opening up a tract for Bhaskaran to pursue his own ideology of 'Indianness' and 'authenticity' on his terms.

The enigmatic content – one that was mystical, esoteric and metaphysical - inflected his mindset in very late 60s. By early 70s Bhaskaran had his own creative scheme operating. In turning to his social environment to which he was sensitized from a young age when he worked in his uncle's studio creating banners and hoardings for advertisements he could recreate and deflect the realities of life. His maturity and interaction with his teachers and peers at the Art Institution initiated an intellectualization and a debate within him on the crucial question of identity and authenticity. These diverse factors were responsible for his questioning of 'Indianness' on which he did a double take for his arguments and inflected it with stimuli from external sources be it encounters with politics, society or any other cultural factors. His art became embedded in the

social matrix becoming central to his vision. It is hence not surprising that titles like 'Life Cycle', 'Evolution', 'and Marriage Photos' carried the weight of this argument.

Within the artistic circle of the Madras Group Bhaskaran's approach and his creative ideologies is at variance with the others. This marks his individuation and yet broadly classifies him with distinct regional modernism. His works though thematically different from the rest of the group is simultaneously consanguine with the others. This is explained by his predilection in formal qualities of picture making particularly the line. So much so that a family resemblance becomes evident. However as an individual Bhaskaran has an aggressive approach to any life situation is polemical in his ideas and refuses the label of a 'rebel' although his works are clear demonstrations of it.

According to Josef James, "His image and the imagery it proceeds from are both frankly instinctive and elemental. The cat, the prime image of his most successful paintings is unmistakably a phallic image. The pair of hills in his earlier work is unmistakably female; so are the legs astraddle in the 'Life Cycle' pictures. The strong sexuality in his pictures however is never indulgent but brought to bear as in life on the mystery of conception and creation of life. There is a foetus...and at least some of his cats done later are recumbent in the manner of life in the womb. Facts of life such as these are too stubborn, dark and unseeing to be taken out of us and set in some abstract frame of thought. Bhaskaran has striven over the last ten to fifteen years of his painting to make this immediate but unmanageable point."[80] [Josef James, 'A Review' on Bhaskaran's Retrospective Exhibition in May 1981]. Josef James critically sums up Bhaskaran's repertoire but his perspective in analyzing it is romantic and does not do enough justice to the intellectual depth of his works. This is to imply that the artist consciously arbitrated through social signs to negate the debate of nativism and inscribe his works with the idea that 'authenticity' and 'Indian' feel can still be demonstrated, but through other potent forms and signs and need not necessarily have to be reinvention of cultural artifacts. Hence Josef James by referencing his 'image and imagery' as 'instinctive and elemental', it goes against the grain of argument, which does not allow Bhaskaran to locate his imagery within the cultural milieu. As a matter of fact the artist through varied cultural signs as his 'Marriage Photo Series', is making a point about the concept of life cycle since indirectly it is a reference to the act of procreation.

S.G. VASUDEV [1941-] PERSONALIZED VISION MEDIATED THROUGH LITERARY IMAGERY.

Vasudev **[Fig. 163]** is an artist whose cerebration on art was not confined to large borrowings or reinventing the vernacular vocabulary as it was with the majority of the artists within the Madras Group. His close association with theater in the persona of Girish Karnad and with literature through the Kannada poet A.K. Ramanujan and D.R. Bendre effectively amalgamated the influences and inspiration from these varied sources to become an integral part of his creative expressions. The 'indigenist' elements in his paintings and drawing were inspired from literary sources, marking Vasudev's posture as different and similar. As a matter of fact it was his literary predilection juxtaposed with artistic penchant that set the course for his preferences of 'drawing' words.

Undeniably Vasudev, a Bangalore born artist played a seminal role like many among in the group to provide momentum and the necessary push required to allow the Madras Art Movement have visibility at pan Indian level. This visibility was in terms of exhibitions laboriously planned and managed by enterprising youths like Vasudev and Bhaskaran who accompanied it to Delhi and Bombay. This annual feature was meant to establish/propagate a new art language developed by the pioneering group at Madras and situated within the locus of the Government College of Arts and Crafts.

Vasudev showed predilection in drawing from a very young age when he watched his mother draw and paint. While studying for an agricultural degree his avocation was creating cartoons publishing them in a local daily, bringing him to the notice of the art critic Venkatachalam who advised him to join the Madras School of Arts and Crafts. He abandoned his agricultural studies and came away to Madras to pursue a career in art. He joined the Applied Art Department and after completion joined the Painting section to graduate with a Diploma in 1968. **[Fig. 164]**.

Vasudev like the other mentioned artists within the Art Institution was sucked into the vortex of the 'Nativist' argument that was taking a center stage in the campus in early 60s. As a student he felt no polarity with this debate centered on the discourse of 'Indianness' and authenticity. He was one of those artists whose high level of awareness within the cultural discourse sensed the need to push towards establishing an individual identity for the Madras Group. This factor becomes relevant with Vasudev more so because he along with Bhaskaran was responsible for regularly taking the Madras artists exhibition annually to Bombay and Delhi at the initiative of

Paniker. In this respect the institutional framework and its related administrative infrastructure largely aided the activity supported by the meticulous and systematic organization of the teacher R. Krishna Rao. If in his ideologies Paniker had the support of experimental and visionary artist-teachers as well as dynamic and energetic students, in this practical aspect of his administrative network his colleagues also equally and ably supported him.

Vasudev particularly felt the pulse of peoples' response in Delhi when he said, "Whenever the Madras artists exhibitions were held the artists would be excitedly waiting to open the huge cartons and have the works displayed. This was the kind of response we used to get from both Delhi and Bombay"[81]. An art critic writing for a daily in the capital commented, "The originality, the individualism and the true Indian character add up to be a real burden on the Delhi fans who are more familiar with the over western-influenced works of their Northern contemporaries. One Northern artist attributed the influence of Indian tradition and religion in these Madrasis to the atmosphere in which they live - their religiosity, temples etc. But is he the Northerner in any less favourable atmosphere. There can only be one answer; they considered the messages from Paris, London and New York as the be all and end all in modern art movements"[82]. The umbrella nomenclature typologising South as "Madrasis" with their misplaced correspondence of values of religion, temples, traditions etc. deflect the condescending attitude of the Delhites. This had an echoe of the replay of colonizers partisanship to the South. These were clear signals of polarization within the country on the much appropriated modernist discourse, amply demonstrating the privileging of varied European and American movements in the North. South on the other hand was moving on a different track with premium placed on indigenous and vernacular idioms without in any way negating the modern stylistic features.

The fermenting scene within the campus of the Art Institution influenced Vasudev as a student. He had instructors in persons such as Paniker, Dhanapal, Munuswamy, and Santhanaraj who insisted on drawing to be the key to all art. According to Sadanand Menon, "This play with line was the polemics of the teachers at the school. Munuswamy's advice to "bury the line" and make it the invisible nervous system of the painting was directly contrary to Santhanaraj's dictum: "Expose the line; don't hide anything". It was like the two edges of a knife, one for cutting and the other for spreading butter. They were free to take from any source"[83]. This situation could be interpreted as paradoxical with the artists of the Madras Group who consciously overlooked the rich treatment of 'mass' in temple architecture, bronze icons or painted textiles in the South. Or it could also be read as innovative appropriation of regional forms and images, whereby the

ubiquity of mass was marginalized in the nativist agenda and from its skeins the element of line was made manifest to function as their prime material for conceptual mediations.

"Vasudev's refined negotiation of the inheritance of line, pattern and decoration" according to Sadanand Menon, "has been clearly the most dramatic, signifying an open attitude to his own past. Growing with the strongly catalytic influence of Munuswamy's exaggeration of line on the one hand and Paniker's Words and Symbols on the other his penchant for order was to pull him deep into the interiority of the formalism at the heart of the Madras School, before he swung around and reinvented himself as an artist who utilizes his phenomenal skills to revitalize his sources. Space and form meet lyrically in Vasudev's work"[84]. The eulogy by Menon, the cultural critic, is not misplaced as Vasudev's works are indexical of these conglomerations of inspiration intensely driven by his involvement with the group. The works have a distinct aura of the artists search for this 'truth' [indigenous forms] marking his works as distinct and separate but consanguine with the rest.

The Visual Repertoire: Folk and the Mythical

Vasudev's collaborative efforts with the poet A.K. Ramanujan, **[Fig. 165]** with the playwright Girish Karnad; working as Art Director for films like *Samskara* and *Vamsa Vriksha*, learning the art of metal relief from a craftsman and using copper as an extension of his canvas, working with wood inlay artists in Karnataka to create contemporary designs all clearly relate to his pedagogy at the institution. This art-craft approach is strongest in Vasudev's oeuvre and reflects on the orientalist, decorative traditional notion of Indian art lauded by revivalists like William Morris and others as 'primitive' Indian art. And it should be reiterated that these elements of patterning, decorating, drawing and mapping continued to be the high points of the Madras Art School's approach during the tenure of Paniker when he headed the Institution in late 50s and 60s. Besides Paniker, artists like Dhanapal, Munuswamy and Santhanaraj with their anti-colonial resistance and opposition to the populist academic realism of Ravi Varma made a fresh retake of local crafts forms valourizing in the process the inherent principles of patterning and decoration. These characteristics underpin very vibrantly in Vasudev's work and remain a commonality with the entire group.

Paniker particularly when he levelled the hierarchies between art and craft opened up the space for establishing the 'modern regional'. This explains the craftsmanship as an underlying phenomenon with the Madras Group characteristically tracking the process in Vasudev's works.

According to Sadanand Menon, "Paniker's method of 'graphic patterning' had its origins not in any oppositional stance as was imagined, but in the very intricacies of what was institutionalized as art practice by the historic Madras School. It is a legacy that has traveled long and still haunts succeeding batches of students"[85]. According to Jaya Appasamay, "As the 50s progressed there was an increased interest in texture. Different kinds of textures appeared. Line and texture composition became popular. The disintegration of the figure into areas of color important for their own sake emerged in works of Husain and Ram Kumar"[86]. If 'graphic patterning' was institutionalized in the Madras Art School there was simultaneously also a phenomenon of experimentation by artists within the country that ultimately emphasized decorativeness as postulated by Jaya Appasamy to which Paniker was highly aware of. A polemical situation nevertheless but what becomes evident is the capitalization and valorization by Paniker of the art institution's resources that allowed for an approach towards the development of a movement as a whole. And Paniker could not deny the deep-rooted craft oriented curriculum, the books on crafts, the diverse tools, the pattern and design books replete with motifs derived from temple walls and other sources within the institution. Instead of negating and overlooking it to make any other curricula productive, set his gaze on this particularly craft oriented agenda, did a double take on it and made it to be his overarching advantage.

Within an ambience that was stimulating and catalytic Vasudev negotiated his creativity through the space of Indian mythologies, legends and folklore. Says Vasudev, "My imagery is my ideograph, with each detail worked out intuitively. The stain, the blob and the stub drawing on the half dry painted surface are my means of expression"[87]. **[Figs. 166 & 167]** And after years of exploring this narrative, it operates effortlessly for him, grounded as he is in the realm of nature, of cultural history and unconscious thought. He enjoys this terrain, as myths are public and communicable offering him an opportunity to express subliminal mental patterns that come close to the compulsive drives of the unconscious. According to Vasudev, "It is said that at the core of a work of art is its myth, more implicit than explicit which captures the aura of mystery by not revealing all". And Vasudev's paintings inflect this philosophy. The form of his work and the powerful metaphors consciously employed create an ambience of mystery and ambiguity. These metaphors are the '*mithunas* and later the *vriksha.* For several years Vasudev's subject had been the '*mithuna*' theme. The concept of *mithuna* **[Figs. 168 & 169]** is very Indian, its presence ubiquitous on the temple walls not only in Northern India but prevalent also in the Deccan and the South. It enacts the mysteries of creation a dynamic aspect of life itself. In employing it as a metaphor Vasudev explains, "It is not just an act of love between man and woman. It is a vast

concept of love between all forms – between the planets and the earth, between the mountains and the sea, the trees and the birds, reptiles and animals"[88].

Vasudev through his '*mithuna*' series clarified his technique. **[Fig. 170]** He made about three hundred drawings on the *mithuna* theme before he translated them into color or in other words to painting. It is this dimension of his work namely the drawing that makes his contribution within the Madras Group relevant. Like Adimoolam, who was equally grounded in drawing when he initiated his forays in visual art practice, communicating his ideas and narratives through the versatile line, Vasudev seemed to have done the same. Josef James comments on the use of line that was advanced as a technical argument by the members of the movement, "They used line as if it was a thing in itself, with nature and life of its own...They made it move on impulse, so to say, and made with it a style of completely unstructured drawing. Such a drawing was ephemeral, as ephemeral as the space in which it was formed"[89]. His '*mithuna*' compositions suggest the human form incidentally but maintained definitive outlines, using this kind of drawing in a remarkably personal way. The fragmentation and the free-floating forms are largely derivative of Panikers Words and Symbol series as also the very spontaneous use of Kannada script that has a simplified geometric and formal appeal. While exploring his line and form through drawing his approach became bolder. In committing this theme to paint he applied one basic color all over the canvas; and while still wet incised lines with the back of his brush. This resulted in textures animating the surface of his compositions. Slowly the whole composition was gradually built up with other colours. This method and process has remained with Vasudev but largely modified. His meticulous touch is his hallmark, so is his fragmented imagery that floats across the surface of his canvases lending a surrealistic ambience integrated with decorativeness.

Inspired by the myriad quality of nature and the poetry of D.R. Bendre his imagery is poetically inspired that becomes charged making philosophical metaphors out of it. The trope of the folk elements and the fantasy of his lively imagination is now the familiar topos that characterizes his oeuvre. The '*Mithunas*' have recurred again in late 80s with the man as 'He' and the woman as 'She' out of which he has created this series. **[Fig. 171]**

For Vasudev, the idea of *kalpa vriksha* **[Figs. 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177 & 178]** was derived from the poetry of Bendre. It remained with him as a dominant continuous symbol, image and metaphor. The light, the shade, the romance and the mystery of the tree struck him and continued

with him for a long time. The tree of life and knowledge metamorphosed to tree of death when he lost his very dear wife Arnawaz in late 80s. The Tree advanced his art. Compositionally it became easy for him to divide the space either vertically or horizontally with the Tree motif occupying the center Negotiating through the metaphor of the Tree, Vasudev indulges in celebrating life in its vivacity. Could this be a reflection of his conjugal happiness having married the woman he loved Arnawaz Driver an artist in her own right? The Tree in this respect becomes a symbol of plenty. It grew gradually into a 'Tree of Life', which he called as the '*Kalpa Vriksha*'. Says Vasudev, "Later faced with a situation of intense pain, its branches grew into a 'Tree of Life and Death'. It is an abode for the variety of type of life that seeks it for shelter, food and as an arena for playful gamboling especially the monkeys that Vasudev unabashedly employs as a motif for animating his otherwise static compositions. In addition to this his imagery also includes birds and reptiles, fish and fowl, seeds and fruit and men and women. As it is characteristic with his fragmented figuration the tree is identifiable by its dense mass of the trunk decoratively patterned to provide emphasis.

Rumination with Line

Vasudev is a prolific and a versatile artist. Besides painting he draws with intensity and his Drawings can be classified as works in their own rights. His predilection had been line from his childhood days when he watched his mother draw and paint. Since he was inspired by the poetry of Ramanujan and Bendre that proved a strong forte to make drawings not as illustrations but as inspired drawn imagery. Moreover the process of drawing precipitates the creative thought at a faster pace than painting, which requires organization in terms of imagery and color management. Says Vasudev, "Paniker taught us the importance of line in drawing. In fact if there is one characteristic that distinguishes the Madras School, then it is drawing"[90]. **[Figs. 179, 180, 181 & 182]**

Biography and the "Tree" Metaphoric

Vasudev's painted expressions are largely metaphorical and symbolic. In employing them as such, he is reinforcing the metaphysical and the esoteric content that is reflexive of Indian philosophy. His '*Kalpa Vriksha*' or an imaginative tree encapsulates within it the macrocosm and the microcosm of life. A potent metaphor, Vasudev has engaged it forcefully in his works. As a matter of fact one can track his life's progress through the tree concept. From the 'Tree of Life" when he experienced his joyous moments with his life companion including the birth of their son

to her untimely death due to a terminal disease when the **Tree of Life** morphed into the **Tree of Death.** It is a very vocal symbol with Vasudev.

Vasudev's connectivity with life and its indirect or philosophic reflections in his painted statements, drawings or tapestries grounds him to his social realities when nonchalantly he says, "I am part of the society". It is this involvement and the stimulus that he receives being embedded in a social matrix that sets apart Vasudev from many others within the group. In his preoccupation he comes close to R.B. Bhaskaran who reacted to the society and its related culture by making it an integral index of his subject matter. Despite varied and diverse complexities of life that constructs his ideas, his works bear resemblance to those of his mentor Paniker. His motifs are germinal motifs of the physical world explicated by the *mithunas* and the *vrikshas.* Though he has projected them in an organic manner they all eventually become ideograms of movement in nature. The movement of the motifs defines the fluid space they inhabit. His are the pictures without a focal point. A static eye cannot see them, for to look at the whole surface simultaneously arranged about its center is to encounter an attractive chaos. Moreover there is no concentration of formal spatial relations and creates an ephemeral effect. Vasudev therefore through contemplation of natural elements, transforming them as metaphors and symbols confronts his interior feelings.

Vasudev continues to paint today with themes derived from or related to his environment, the life itself and the performing arts. He has produced series like He and She a take off on the *mithunas* of his early 70s, followed by **Earthscapes, Mindscapes, Theatre of Life, [Fig. 183].** In widening his creative base Vasudev has now entered the realm of tapestry weaving ably aided by a traditional weaver from Karnataka who has enabled Vasudev to translate his canvas 'as it were' into tapestries **[Figs. 184 & 185].** Vasudev in this respect like Gopinath or Achuthan maintains and continues the tradition of amalgamating Art and Craft propagated by their guru Paniker. Implicated in this stance is the hierarchical axing to bring weaving into mainstream 'high art'.

C. DOUGLAS [1951-] AND K. MURALIDHARAN [1954-]

Both these artists belong to the third generation within the Madras Group. The first generation artists were Paniker, Dhanapal. Krishna Rao, Janakiram, Ram Gopal, Munuswamy, Santhanaraj and others; the second generation were Alphonso, Adimoolam Vasudev, Bhaskaran, Viswanathan, Gopinath, Haridasan among others; while the third gneration making their impact

from the portals of this institution internationally are Rm. Palaniappan [detailed in Chapter IV], Douglas and Muralidharan.

Both Douglas and Muralidharan however represent polar opposites with their ideologies and working methods. Both undoubtedly are figurative painters for while Douglas is expressionist and anthropocentric, Muralidharan in the tradition of the Madras Art Movement is a mythical contemporary artist with his imagery grounded in folk art forms and ideas derived from mythical tales. Ranjit Hoskote commenting on Douglas works of late 80s says, "Douglas in his works pays homage to medieval masters like Pieter Brueghel and Hieronymous Bosch [15th century Flanders] creating anti heroic imagery trapped in a world that has altered dramatically and reduced life to an unendurable incoherence, becoming his basic concern. Encoding imitations of after life in his paintings, Douglas makes space for speculation. His macabre and witty games are played across crumpled and scribbled textures, but their implicit drama is quieter, suggestive of ritual surfaces rubbed smooth by faith"[91].

Douglas **[Fig. 186]** before arriving at his figurative imagery in late 80s and early 90s, went through a process of finding his artistic style that would lend itself to his life's philosophy. Given as he is to deep introspection on every facet of life, Douglas came under the influence of Ramanujam and Paniker in late 70s at Cholamandal. Both the artists nevertheless were no more but he had seen them work and had seen their works. Paniker's works, Douglas characterizes as 'narrative and scientific', which he elaborates as intuitive and verifiable, while Ramanujam's works he labeles as pure 'narratives' containing timeless elements of fantasy creatures. In closely identifying with these two artists who nevertheless were polarities, Douglas works produced at this time were an amalgamation of intuitive elements and the regional vocabulary that Paniker testified to in his works.

Douglas works of early 70s titled as **'Painting with an unidentified' [Fig. 187] 'Spot, First there is a Mountain, then there is no Mountain, then there is' [Fig. 188]** links it to the nativist discourse. It has echoes of cultural elements as snake, kolam, yantric diagrams, and cryptic diagrammatic representations reminiscent of Paniker's Words and Symbols Series. **An Arrow to his Memory [Fig. 189]** is reflective of Ramanujam's works not stylistically but narratively, indexing the introspective process of Douglas in late 70s. Douglas sensitivity towards life and people is intensely raw and this perhaps explains his affinity towards the working methods of K.Ramanujam and his figurative imagery tortured but painfully intrinsic to his persona. After his

graduation from the College of Arts and Crafts Douglas left the country to live in Germany for the greater part of 80s. He aborted his stay there and returned to Cholamandal Artist Village and since then has been a resident of the village.

The idealism of 70s [nativist ideology] had become sterile and was on the wane. Douglas needed to move ahead to explore his own style. While in Germany, Douglas encountered the tradition of Expressionists and the Bauhaus with the latter's emphasis on design and colour. He combined these influences in his works. Consequent to these confrontations of varying nature in the creation of art, Douglas moved beyond ambiguity of his early works to declare a 'universalism'. By this Douglas clearly explicates the retrenching of any ambiguities or narrative elements that may significantly relate to culture and privileged the formal elements, which requires no translation and are easily comprehended. The formal elements made his works take on an appearance of cryptic diagrammatic geometricity. **[Figs. 190, 191, 192, 193, 194 & 195]** This move of Douglas to create hard edged abstraction subconsciously links it to his Cholamandal experiences where the politics of cultural representation insisted upon subtly by Paniker on one hand and other artists who defied this representational compulsion on the other releases its tension for him through these pure geometric paintings. Not surprising that he labels these works as 'universal' evacuating his works of any other considerations but for its formal qualities. His relationship with materials simultaneously began here. The hard-edged effects that he was able to produce in these works were directly concerned with his working process. He used masking fluid, to cover the paper and then sprayed the paint on with toothbrush. After the paint had dried, he would remove the masking fluid and begin the process all over again in another part of his work, creating layers of paint. This resulted in translucent and transparent effects juxtaposed and superimposed with detailed precision. Over the geometric forms thus created, Douglas would inscribe it with details that enhanced the texture further. The process of working for Douglas was one of introspection and his subjects gradually emerged from his materials.

In the tradition of the Madras Art Movement, preoccupation with material and techniques is what binds Douglas and Muralidharan to its modernist program. The School of Arts and Crafts had been a site marking progress in a technological driven world with artistic explorations in techniques and media. It also made attempts to marginalize and resist overworked modernist stylistic expressions within its regional program from mid 50s with the lineage continuing through in late 70s. Both Douglas and Muralidharan's compositions privilege the artistry in conjunction with the theme.

For Douglas perhaps it was a cathartic process in the way he literally washed and bathed his canvas or surface several times in water and other liquids until it was malleable enough to initiate the process of decoding of his internal energies. His works attend more to this physicality where the support especially the paper he crumbles, cleaves, splits, burns and rifts before commencing his layering with crayons, charcoal sticks or thin layers of transparent water color washes until they become thickly coated. The process is visceral enabling an unselfconscious play of personalized pain and wound.

Douglas has a philosophic bent of mind, and he attempts to situate his experiences according to his reading of various critical theorists or cultural philosophers as and when it corresponds with his working ideologies or mind set and explicates the reading of his works accordingly. Certain works would show him implicating Nietzsche's philosophy; clarifying through them the structures of experiences that are intuitively conditioned and resident within; while he searches for a reality, which remains elusive. This concept was very strong with Douglas after his long sojourn in Europe. Through the powerful medium of paint and other manipulated materials, he attempts a projection of truth, the perspective of which is individual/universal. His articulate visual language expresses his subconscious subjectivity, to play upon the surface and to be read in many layers. The darkness of the unconscious visualized with marks of line and skillful employment of color that subtly not only differentiates but also emphasizes to realize the strength of his concepts. He wants his works not to be read across the surface, but to be understood as pluralistic in Barthesian's meaning of 'the text as practicing the infinite deferment of the signified', so it remains an interesting dialogue alive and charged between the sign and the viewer. His mixed media technique allows for the play of tactile values, evoked with textures indexing it as salient characteristic also provoking sensuous enjoyment. The two- dimensionality emphasizes a continuity that is meditative and distinctive, decorative and expressive. The palette is oppressively dark and somber or bright and titillating **[Fig. 196]** where perhaps; Douglas searches the subconscious in the philosophic milieu of alienation, fragmentation and fragility of existence. This also is explanatory of his artistic statements being untitled in order not to fix his imagery in a particularized context but daringly levitated to be mysterious and ambiguous. Like his hero K.Ramanujam he brings to his work abundant wit in caricatured details as in the 'Rain' **[Fig. 197]** His Untitled mixed media work **[Fig. 198]** is a take on, of medieval masters, with a simulated crucified figure and vertical planar dimensions. He has wittingly parodied the

renaissance masters preoccupation with perspectivial space with a plum line dropped vertically through two planes to the bottom.

Muralidharan **[Figs. 199 & 200]** in his approach to his materials and technique is grounded in the spirit of experimentation and innovation. His long sojourn to Europe opened up possibilities of employing with versatility different types and kinds of industrial or any other materials to enhance the textural values and make an impact on the organization of space wherein he manipulates both positive and negative spaces to create a meaningful dialogue. His organization of space has evolved gradually from **Mystic Valley [Figs. 201 to 211],** [1981], a series on which he worked for nearly a decade. It begins as highly attenuated academic realistic work with its high horizon line and the landscape laid out with overlapping forms; to gradually his compositions morphing to mythical representation in its compositional structure that occupy the entire surface in a free play. This dimension of his work is reinforced by his technique as Sadanand Menon says, "Muralidharan works on his surfaces like a mason piling mud, sand, sawdust, textile rags, newspaper anything that enables to build in a subtext"[92]. His textural experimentations has references to his teachers namely Alphonso, Santhanaraj, Munuswamy. It's a genealogy that is inherited by Douglas, Muralidharan and Palaniappan.

Muralidharan's imagery is rooted and derived from the stockpile of repertoire from Indian mythology that today is his signature style. Says Muralidharan, "If one denies his roots he misses a lot of values in his works of art. The subject of mythology has been evergreen in my memory and has formed a constant source of inspiration". Geeta Kapur has postulated on the ideology of one's roots saying, 'During the decade of 60s questions have been posed about one's roots. Perhaps these images are more authentic and enduring that derive sustenance from these roots...The roots are not visible, nor the image mechanically derived. Both are to be discovered and this discovery is an aspect of the artistic quest for identity which every artist undertakes"[93].
For Muralidharan this aspect of artistic quest that would inscribe his Indian identity indirectly within the regional paradigm became central to his iconography tethered to in myths and other narratives. The collective unconscious comes to play a central role in his works reinforced further by Muralidharan's conservative background. These early experiences and groundings in tradition become cemented, dramatically making their appearance for Muralidharan subverting the sanctity of the imagery to play upon it either wittily or parodies enhancing complicity with mass or popular culture.

By exploring the vast repertoire of his chosen iconography it allowed for the artist an arbitration of forms, images, symbols and metaphors to have a wider space within his art. His delineation of the hybrid forms particularly the morphed imagery of *Kamadhenu* tigers, elephants and birds is well known. Playing upon the surface, he emphasizes a strong two-dimensionality that not only reinforces the decorative character but also enhances his color manipulations. A brilliant colorist, his works have intimate and endearing details that lend interest. His inspiration has come from stories related to him during his childhood, which he now externalizes with a surrealist feel and imagery. The naiveté and simplicity of form have strength and power as he piles them one over the other to weave a pattern. His large-scale works reflect the Indian mural tradition where the protagonist occupies a hierarchical position, be it a mythical *Kamdhenu*, tiger, elephant or a goddess. This provides a lead, and the rest of the details become a subtext in his enterprise of painting.

Muralidharan's oeuvre within the familiarity of mythical themes has been created painstakingly like a craftsman involved in producing a perfect flawless form. In adhering to reinvented traditional motifs and imagery he was reinforcing the politics of selection to become the main player. A brilliant manager of color organization he intuits to create colored spaces that are markedly free flowing and geometric. There are echoes of Paniker's Words and Symbols, Vasudev's fragmented and floating forms, Bhaskaran's spontaneous child like freedom in expressive symbols and the undeniable tradition of experimentation with technique and media – an inherent aspect of the Art School. In many respects the Thanjavur born artist reflect the milieu from which he comes with strong sentiments about his culture and his pride in it. His sentiments and approach to his art is romantic when he confesses, "Doing any creative work, the main theme should be born out of one's experiences and feelings. It is then that his works gains value and immense power, as his personal statements are based on the strength of his own convictions. History has proved this repeatedly and as an artist I believe in this theory" [94]. Muralidharan is reiterating his involvement with 'content' and the move is towards the 'native' experience making his art more personal and meaningful that is Indian born of tradition and of the popular culture. Through iconic and mythical configurations, Muralidharan's modernity is borne out, in which daily observances of wayside iconic images, brightly colored gopuram sculptures, the rituals and festivals of dance and music come together to define and situate his art in the present. This aesthetic of Muralidharan significantly places him within mainstream modern Indian art by his centering of the artistic practice in a 'dialectical synthesis' [Geeta Kapur] within the country's post-colonial history.

WOMEN ARTISTS WITHIN THE MADRAS ART MOVEMENT

Women's consciousness sharpened at the turn of the century under the impact of colonial education and nationalist concerns. The earliest evidence of women artists in colonial India is the art exhibition held in Calcutta in 1879, in which twenty-five amateur women artists took part. In the early years of the twentieth century Tagore's niece Sunayani Debi, a housewife, won celebrity status as a naïve artist, while Amrita Sher-Gill was the first professional woman artist in India. In the first decade after Independence few women artists did emerge namely, Shanu Lahiri, Kamala Roy Chowdhary, Kamala Das Gupta and Amina Ahmad, were seeking to establish their professional credentials. In the Nehruvian era, it is argued, women groped for individual expressions within the dominant artistic framework, caught in the dialectic between the representation of women in art and their self-representation as women[95].

Among the women artists who were trained at this historical art institution namely the School of Arts and Crafts, there were a few who persuaded their careers in art against many odds. In mentioning them I wish to emphatically point out that they too played a seminal role, but the analysis of their works involves deeper introspection and interpretive philosophies. However in so far as their works shed light on their male contemporaries, it is important to discuss their works. It remains outside the scope of this thesis to provide such detailing though a brief survey of their works becomes mandatory. Or else this thesis remains incomplete.

These women artists as mentioned have though played a marginal role within the Madras Art Movement nevertheless what emerges and becomes relevant in this context is that in a conservative and male dominated patriarchal set up these women artists were able to mark important signposts created by their individuation through intense struggle. The most prominent who were able to establish themselves with their individual styles are Arnawaz Vasudev nee Driver, [1945-1988] T.K. Padmini, [1943-1982] Rani Pooviah nee Nanjappa, Anila Thomas nee Jacob, [1941 -] and Premlatha Hanumanthiah Seshadhri [1947-] the first three were painters, while Premlatha who graduated in 1970 though part of the Madras Group, her works in many respect stands apart from them. Anila Jacob is a sculptor. Unfortunately Arnawaz, Rani and Padmini today are no more having died at a comparative young age. These artists were truly progressive with a determination to make a mark for themselves in this arena particularly in the late 60s and early 70s.

Ramabai, Paniker's wife was also trained to be an artist but she gave her career a backseat when she married and decided to have a family. Arnawaz was determined to join the School of Arts and Crafts but she was enrolled as a student in the Applied Art Department – a course that would enable future wifely preoccupations if at all as envisaged by her parents. But the open door policy operating within the institution allowed students from any department to be practicing in any other. And Arnawaz found herself constantly in the Painting Department where Paniker spotted her talents. Padmini, the wife of painter K. Damodaran died before her art could achieve maturity but her prolific output has ensured a place of importance within the Madras Group. Rani Nanjappa was active until her marriage and an unfortunate road accident led to brain injury in late 70s and almost after a decade in this condition she passed away in 1988. But Anila Jacob took up the difficult terrain of sculpture which many men artists avoided as it involved physical labor, was expensive and required a larger work place. Viswanathan who could have had a productive career, as a sculptor did not invade this site because of the reasons mentioned and decided to become a painter.

All the four artists were actively involved in the movement that was taking shape in consonance with the teachers and students within the institution in early 60s. For all of these women artists line became a dominant player in their compositions. For Arnawaz her imagery was laden with regional or the nativist echoes. It had the strength of her personality intimately associated with it to make it her signature style. The fragmented and floating forms were echoes of her teacher Paniker that remained with her as her characteristic style till the last. She was versatile in the use of diverse media and her predilection was drawing. **[Figs. 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217 & 218]** Says Josef James, " Arnawaz shares with the great tribal artists the free quality of the mere line in her drawing. The wet paper the artist uses for her ground in certain stages of her work facilitates the graded washes of Indian ink, which appear to settle with ease forming textures of considerable charm and pictorial utility. The total impact created by the textured washes of the ink and the strange and sometimes eerie life forms suggested by the tenuous wire like lines, is one of a strange modernity at once austere and bizarre"[96].

Rani Najappa's compositions of early 60s reflected a preoccupation with 'space' not the numenal space of the pictorial compositions but the outer space of the universe. Comments M.V. Devan on these compositions, " Her present paintings with their broad sense of space and design, draftsmanship and meticulous attention to the deeper aspects of picture making, amply justify the course of her work"[97]. In early 70s she was attracted to the designs of *kolam* or the floor

decorations common in Tamil Nadu and other areas and produced a series on it. She played upon its intricacies and derived her decorative patterning to allow it as a governing denominator in her works. The Kolam Series incidentally were produced in United States and it meaningfully reflects her roots in an alien country. The painting Homage to the Kolam is sensuously erotic with its suggestive curved lines patterned with abstract colours. Admiringly simple with absolute symmetry dictating the two dimensional composition it obliquely has echoes of tantric ideograms. The Hard Edge painters working in 70s in America seems to have affected her imagery and decorative and rich colored surfaces. **[Figs. 219 to 224]**

T. K. Padmini's imagery was insular concerned with her sensitivity as a woman and her relationship with her environment. It was idyllic particularly in the landscapes she rendered espousing a romantic mindset. Her female nudes are well endowed situated in plenitude of nature. Obliquely Padmini manifested her sexuality in these female forms. Her technique and the style of rendering forms had affinity to mural designs. A brilliant colorist she mediated her expressions meaningfully through this element. Her manipulation of space rings true of western academicism but maneuvered to inflect a modernist sensibility. This becomes obvious in her reductive imagery that has the strength of Indian pictorial tradition underlying her calculated forms derived from nature as well as the human figures. Her imagery was dominantly anthropocentric clearly setting her apart in many respects from her fellow artists where a strong tendency towards abstraction was a defining factor with many others. She carried the burden of the nativist agenda while a student but gradually weaned herself away from it to develop her own iconography. [**Figs. 225 & 226**]

Premlatha Seshadhri's **[Fig. 227]** works offer dramatically a different approach. In consonance with the school's curriculum, Premlatha intensely explored different techniques and settled to paint with gouache on paper. This technique lent itself well to her experiments with space as a concept. The contemplative empty spaces through which she was attempting to convey her expressions led her to reading extensively on Zen philosophy. In the tradition of Zen, she orchestrates the empty spaces as an energetic force. The spaces are thus not passive rather creates a dialectical relationship with forms, making her works interactive. Her subjects were mainly birds, fish and turtles creatures that inhabit both earth and water. In this respect her works mark a definite departure from the others within the group though nevertheless the oriental philosophy becomes central to her ideology. **[Figs. 228, 229 & 230]**

Anila Jacob in her plastic statements was conditioned by the European sculptors particularly Henry Moore and the Constructivists. She has worked in a variety of media from terracotta to cement to wood and settled with metal particularly copper later on to project her expressions . Her manipulation and projection of space within her carved imagery has echoes of Archipenko where the positive spaces translate as negative. She was acutely aware of all these possibilities and mutated it with her personalized vision that makes it very regional. Echoes of folk art forms relate it to her regional sensibility with emphasis on curvilinear patterns. She works and lives in Kerela. **[Figs. 231, 232 & 233]**

I reiterate the fact that the detailing of the above-mentioned Women artists requires specialized study as already mentioned, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. But it becomes mandatory to mention them to underline the male dominated art scene that constituted art practice. Whether their visibility within the discourse of the Madras Art Movement marks it as feminist intervention in the 70s or subsumed within the Indian modernism is a point of contention, which exceeds the scope of this thesis.

END NOTES FOR THE CHAPTER

[1] According to Gilles Deleuze "There are two ways of transcending figuration [whether illustrative or narrative]· toward abstract form or toward figure. Cézanne alluded toward figure by the term sensation, as figure is the sensible form related to it. Abstract form on the other hand is directed to the brain, and acts through the brain. Sensation is not the free or disembodied play of light and color, rather sensation is in the body even if the body is an apple. Sensation is that which is painted; that which is painted in the painting of the body and what Cézanne would term as 'to paint sensations", in Gilles Deleuze, 'Nomad Philosophy of Art' in Contextualizing Aesthetics : From Plato to Lyotard, ed. H and Gene Blocker Jennifer M. Jeffers, [Wadsworth Publishing Company 1999] 230.

[2] Encyclopedia of World Art, [London Macraw Hill Publication, 1958] 454

[3]K G. Subramanyan, The Living Tradition Perspectives on Modern Indian Art, [Calcutta· Sea Gull Books 1987] 57

[4]Ulli Beier, Sultan Ali, A Monograph, [New Delhi. Lalit Kala Akademi, 1983].

[5] Anis Farooqi, 'The Role of the Script in Contemporary Indian Painting', Lalit Kala Contemporary, No. 32, [New Delhi: April 1985] 11.

[6] In conversation with his daughter Mumtaz Ali Khan in an interview, July 2001.

[7] Rasa is an emotive theory first formulated by Bharata in Natyasashtra (2nd century B.C.) and later developed into a general poetic principle. Literally 'savour' rasa has come to mean "aesthetic relish" generally taken to be a theory of emotional response to art works. It concerns two related ideas - the emotional content and the experience produced by the work in the viewer or the rasika

[8] Ulli Beier, J Sultan Ali, A Monograph, [New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1983].

[9] In conversation with Mumtaz khan, his daughter at her residence in Cholamandal Artist Village, July 2001

[10]Ulli Beier, J. Sultan Ali, A Monograph, [New Delhi Lalit Kala Akademi, 1983].

[11] Ulli Beier, J. Sultan Ali.
[12] Nalini, "Sreenivasulu: A creative Genius", Unpublished M A. Dissertation, Dept of Fine Arts, Stella Maris College, Chennai, 1983, 10
[13] Nalini, "Sreenivasulu: A creative Genius", 20.
[14] Nalini, "Sreenivasulu: A creative Genius", 21.
[15] The events leading up to this major commission was instigated by C Rajagopalchari when he was the chief minister of Madras and had visited this temple. Its historical murals impressed him and requested K Subbha Rao the minister to ensure that these monuments of art were not lost to posterity He therefore commissioned Sreenivasulu and P L Narasimhamurthy to copy them In the early 50's the linguistic division of the states had not taken place and part of the present state of Andhra Pradesh was part of the Madras Presidency

[16] S A Krishnan. 'K. Sreenivasulu', A Monograph, [New Delhi· Lalit Kal Akademi, 1966] 10

[17] Nalini, 'K. Sreenivasulu, A Creative Genius,' Unpublished M A. Dissertation, Dept. of Fine Arts, Stella Maris College, Chennai,1982, 53.

[18] Nalini, "Sreenivasulu: A creative Genius", 54.
[19] A.S Raman, 'K. Sreenivasulu', The Southern Accent, , [Chennai: Tamil Nadu Ovia Nunkalai Kuzhu, 1998] 194.

[20] A.S. Raman, 'K. Sreenivasulu', The Southern Accent, , 194-195
[21] Jaya Appaswamy, 'The Linear Mode', Lalit Kala Contemporary No 22, [New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1976] 1.

[22] Ziauddin Sardar and Borin Van Loon, Introducing Cultural Studies, [United Kingdom· Icon Books, 1999] 116-117.

[23] Geeta Kapur, When was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India, [New Delhi: Tulika Publication, 2000] 307.

[24] Chaitanya Sambrani, Tracing the Indian Modern Group 1890, Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, Department of Art History and Aesthetics, M S. University, Baroda, 1995.

[25] In conversation with the artist, Aug. 1998 at his residence, Chennai.

[26] quoted in 'Indigenism – An Attitude of Retrogression', No 70, Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, Department of Art history and Aesthetics, 1990.

[27] In conversation with Mrs Naidu July 2001 at her residence in Chennai

[28] Rambai, "Redappa Naidu", Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, Department of Fine Arts, Stella Maris College, Chennai, 1985

[29]In conversation with the artist at his residence in Chennai August 1998.

[30] 'Redappa Naidu A tribute', Catalogue [Bangalore: Time and Space Art Gallery, 1999]

[31] 'Redappa Naidu A tribute', Catalogue.
[32] In conversation with the artist at his residence in March 2001

[33] In conversation with Alphonso Arul Doss at his residence in Chennai, December 2001
[34] In conversation with Douglas at Apparao Galleries, Chennai, October 2001

[35] Anjali Sircar, "The Problems of Indigenous Sources of Inspiration", Lalit Kala Contemporary No 32, [New Delhi Lalit Kala Akademi, 1985] 17

[36] While in conversation with the artist a student who brought her works for comments that I witnessed this dimension of his personality

[37] Anjali Sircar, 'The Problems of Indigenous Sources of Inspiration' Lalit Kala Contemporary No 32, [New Delhi Lalit Kala Akademi, 1985] 17

[38] Uma Nair, "Santhanaraj – When Drawing is an Illusion" http /www Kumargallery.com/catalogue/santhanaraj

[39] Anjali Sircar, 'The Problems of Indigenous Sources of Inspiration' Lalit Kala Contemporary No. 32, [New Delhi Lalit Kala Akademi, 1985] 17

[40] In conversation with the artist at his residence in Chennai, March 2001.

[41] Uma Nair, "Santhanaraj – When Drawing is an Illusion" http /www kumargallery com/catalogue/santhanaraj

[42] In conversation with the artist Muralidharan at Department of Fine Arts, Stella Maris College, Chennai, August 2002

[45] In conversation with Soli Daruwalla at his residence in Chennai, March 2002
[46] In conversation with Gopinath at his residence in Chennai Dec 2001

[47] In conversation with the artist at his residence in March 2001

[48] In conversation with the artist at his residence in March 2001
[49] In conversation with the artist at his residence in February 2001

[50] Partha Mitter, Indian Art, [New Delhi Oxford University Press, 2001] 76-78.

[51] Margaret Olin, 'Gaze', in Critical terms for art history, eds. Robert S Nelson and Richard Schiff, [Chicago· The University of Chicago Press, 1996] 208-210

[52] Anjali Sircar, A song of love, New Delhi [an Ananda Patrika Bazaar Publication] Oct. '79

[53] In conversation with the artist Anthony Doss at his residence August 2001 interview with the artist

[54] In conversation with the artist Alphonso at his residence in Chennai December 2001

[55] S. Nandagopal, 'Destiny's Child', Illustrated Weekly of India, January, 1991, pg. 12-13

[56] In conversation with the artist at Cholamandal Artist Village, December 2001

[57] S Nandagopal, 'Destiny's Child', Illustrated Weekly of India, January, 1991, pg 12-13

[58] Partha Mitter, Indian Art, [New Delhi Oxford University Press, 2001] 214

[59] Yusuf Arakkal, 'The Past in Colours on the Canvas', Sunday Herald, December 9th, 1984

[60] In conversation with the artist at his residence in Chennai, December 2001
[61] Anjali Sircar, "The Problems of Indigenous Sources of Inspiration', Lalit Kala Contemporary, No 32, [New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1985]

[62] In conversation with the artist at his residence in Chennai, December 2001.
[63] In conversation with the artist at his residence in Chennai, December 2001
[64] Anjali Sircar, 'In Pursuit of Light', in the magazine, Frontline, November 16-29, 1985

[65] Anjali Sircar, 'In Pursuit of Light'.
[66] A.S. Raman, 'Christ in Indian Colours' The Times of India, Sunday, May 8, 1983.

[67] Anjali Sircar, write up in the invitation of 'Exhibition of Paintings by Alphonso' at the Taj Art Gallery, Bombay 26th December 1978 to 1st January 1979
[68] In conversation with the artist at his residence in Chennai, December, 2001

[69] Suresh Menon, 'The Great Teacher-Artist' in The Suday Express Magazine' March 2002

[70] In conversation with the artist at his residence in Chennai, June 2002

[71] In conversation with the artist at his residence in Chennai 19th June 2002.

[72] I In conversation with the artist at his residence in Chennai 19th June 2002

[73] Anjali Sircar, 'The Problems of Indigenous Sources of Inspiration", Lalit Kala Contemporary, No. 32, [New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1985]

[74] In conversation with the artist at his residence in Chennai 19th June 2002.
[75] Suresh Menon, 'Bhaskaran on Cats', The New Sunday Express, 2nd December, 2001.
[76] Suresh Menon, 'Bhaskaran on Cats'
[77] Mallika Madhavan, 'Graphic art of Tamil Nadu 1950 onwards with special emphasis on Chennai', unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, 2000, 32-34

[78] Preminda Jacob, 'The Artist as a Social Being' Catalogue, October 1984

[79] In conversation with the artist Bhaskaran at his residence in Chennai, June 2002.

[80] Josef James, 'A Review' on Bhaskaran's Retrospective Exhibition in May 1981
[81] In conversation with the artist at his residence in Bangalore, April 2001

[82] Author unknown, 'Tradition and Personality join in the Madras painters' Arts and Letters, April 23rd 1967

[83] Sadanand Menon, Time, Trace, Transitions", Recent works of S G. Vasudev, C. Doughlas, K Muralidharan, Rm Palaniappan, Catalogue, [Bangalore. January 2001] 5

[84] Sadanand Menon, Time, Trace, Transitions", 6
[85] Sadanand Menon, Time, Trace, Transitions", 6
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[88] Anjali Sircar, 'A Vision Growing like a Tree', The Hindu, October 15th, 1978

[89] Josef James, 'S G Vasudev', Lalit Kala Contemporary Nos 19&20, [New Delhi Lalit Kala Akademi, 1975] 38

[90] Suresh Menon, 'More than the Sum of his Parts', The New Sunday Express Magazine, January 7th, 2001.

[91] Ranjit Hosekote, View from the Edge Catalogue, [Bombay Synergy Art Foundation, 1995]

[92] Sadanand Menon, Time, Trace, Transitions", Recent works of S G Vasudev, C Doughlas, K Muralidharan, Rm. Palaniappan, Catalogue, [Bangalore January 2001].
[93] Geeta Kapur, 'Contemporary Indian Art –1960s,' Supplement to Marg Volume XXI, No 1, [Bombay. December 1967]

[94] K. Muralidharan, "Divine Inspiration' Illustrated Weekly of India, June 15-21, 1991

[95] Partha Mitter, Indian Art, [New Delhi Oxford University Press, 2001] 227
[96] Josef James, 'V. Arnawaz', Art Trends, [Madras Cholamandal Artist Village date not given]

[97] M V Devan, 'Rani Pooviah', Art Trends, Vol. IV, [Madras: Cholamandal Artist Village, Jan – April, 1965]