

Dhaskar
K. N.

Kedappa Naidu

S. D.

K.M. Adimoolam

Kam

Alphonso Arul

Kam Nani
Palani

Pemalatha Shes

K.V. Haridasan

K. Nishan R. D.

Bhaskar

Kedappa Naidu

S. D.

K.M. Adimoolam

CONCLUSION

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“One is tempted to plot a tendentious narrative of oriental transmutation during the decades 1960-80 to show how the Parisian aesthetics was surmounted by the hegemonic American notions of freedom in the matter of world culture, how this was questioned by the liberationist rhetoric of the latter world, and how all this contributed to form a distinct [rather than derivative] entity called Modern Indian art. And how it acquired a national seal”¹.

The central premise of this thesis is based upon the modernity of the Madras Art Movement. Subsumed within its text are the ambivalence of tradition and modernity and the definition of regional modern. The latter was consequent to the heterogeneous character of the group coming together on a common ground. This was the sourcing of regional or local art forms in affiliations with western modern stylistic features and its efforts at projecting itself into the national mainstream from the Southern confines of the country. The heterogeneity of the Madras Art Movement is also made explicit in terms of relational center and periphery binaries, the former shifting between the international modernism [the West] and the national modernism. The peripheral Southern region was able to enhance its innovations and experimentations in artistic expressions since it did not have to bear the weight of dominant influences that conditioned the center i.e. particularly American abstraction and European Expressionism and Cubism. And its isolation and distance from the center allowed the Southern periphery to shape its independent movement. This enriched the contribution to the development of the Modern Indian art within the post-independence milieu particularly to the decades of 60s and 70s.

Since the title encircles ‘modernity’ it becomes imperative to analyze this historical factor with reference to the Madras Art Movement. Modernity as analyzed in India has been essentially the process of modernization of varied social, political and economic institutions, and ‘modernism’ as an attitude similarly impressed itself on the visual arts. This resulted in the cultural life of the country being alternately conservative and progressive. Modernism in India had to bear the burden of its historic past effectively mediating through the high art of its classical civilization and through the construct of ‘invented tradition’ in the nationalist agenda. These two factors were closely allied within the arena of ‘modernism’, which was a cultural and historical period in the late 19th and early 20th century. This period was to become a dominant force in influencing

the character and configuration of the emerging modern Indian art. The 'modernism' fundamentally was directed towards a process that required and involved experimentations of not only techniques and materials but also privileging new concepts and ideas in artistic expressions and centrality premised on the uniqueness of the creative individual.

The modernity that I refer to particularly within the Indian context is the romantic, evocative, anti-realist aspect of certain areas of modern art that appealed to Indian artists namely the "derivative" stylistic features of Postimpressionism, Cubism, Fauvism, Expressionism and Abstraction as it developed in Europe and America. Within this was also encapsulated the appropriation of folk and tribal art tradition paralleling the 'primitivism' that influenced the mode of representation in works of artists like Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque among the most prominent of the European artists. The relevant and crucial question is the impact made upon the Indian consciousness, in the thrust, that modernity provided, in the developing configuration of its art, in the country particularly from 1920 onwards.

In the geographical area south of the Vindhyas the rippling effects and influence of modern Western art reached late in the 40s. This was mediated primarily through the colonial institution of Madras School of Arts and Crafts and especially in the persona of the artist-teacher K.C.S. Paniker. The School actively engaged in this pedagogy, introduced in the curriculum, by Paniker, in the years following the political independence from the colonizers to enrich the imaginative faculties of the students. A move in this direction enabled the students to explore tracts in art that otherwise would have been unknown except through art education.

Another dominant factor that delayed the percolation of new ideas and forms was the binary of center periphery operating between the political capital [Delhi] and the South, since largely Bombay and Delhi had appropriated a favoured status because of their commercial and political affiliations. And Madras became marginalized, when it was denied the active role, a situation from colonial intervention, which gave Madras a provincial character, based according to its administrators on the lack of understanding of the Dravidian languages, which nevertheless was only one among many factors, marking it as less dynamic to confront either Bombay or Delhi in its commercially or politically favoured status.

It is important to point out that economic parameters largely decided the development of the presidency during the colonial regime. Though Madras on the Corommonadal coast was first to be established by the British East India Company in 1640, to trade particularly in textiles, the city lost its favoured status due to series of crippling famines and drought that hit in 1718, 1736 and 1876. Water supply became problematic and emigration to the Presidency town went down drastically. From the beginning “the land in Madras was thought to be of inferior quality. Government expenditures exceeded the revenues collected”². These dissuading geographical factors led to the shifting of economic and commercial base from Madras to Calcutta in 1773, eventually becoming the seat of British Governor-General. Consequent to this political maneuver Madras Presidency was marginalized by its administrators, since no acts of reforms, neither statesman policies nor remedial measures were implemented to improve the economic conditions of the Presidency. The concept of capitalism is purely based on economic factors, the material prosperity that enhances the process of modernization. Hence linking these factors, it establishes with clarity that Madras presidency gradually was marginalized since it could not contribute to the economic welfare of the Colonial regime. Moreover “industrial revolution inflicted serious injury upon the indigenous industries on which Madras had flourished³ as the market was flooded with mass-produced industrial goods. The varied geographical, economical and political factors had cast south outside the range of ongoing developments that had hallmarked other metropolises.

II

The post-independence phase had to negotiate another cultural space with folk and tribal trope as dominant topos. Stylized forms with overtly pastoral and romanticized themes, evolved during nationalist discourse were now replaced by a lure towards ethnicity and intra-cultural indigenism. This critical factor was to dominate the definition of identity and India’s cultural authenticity from the vantage position of internationalism in the 60s, since this had become the chief accepted criterion, within third world consciousness.

Hence what seems to be emerging was a strong cultural force particularly in the late 50s debating the sensitive agenda of indigenism/or and nativism within pan national milieu. This ‘traditional revivalist’ trend was not based on idealization of India’s artistic heritage popularized during the nationalist movement when it was collated with strategies for political autonomy. But fundamentally emerging from this debate and argument was the possibility of negotiating the regional cultural space, which at this juncture enabled Paniker to confirm the relevance of South India’s historical tradition with its brilliance of art forms integrating decorativeness with

craftsmanship This was productively juxtaposed to create a confluence of meaningful relationship of its art forms with modernity's experimental concepts in terms of innovative materials and investigational techniques. This manoeuvre allowed for marking a terrain into which the Madras Art movement established its identity and character, leading towards diversity of the collective endeavour in the construction of modern Indian art.

III

It was within the heart of colonial establishment that cultural nationalism took its shape. In Madras, the colonial established school nearly one hundred and fifty-two years old played a seminal role in allowing for such an art movement to happen. The Art School, with its revised curriculum under the headship of Roy Chowdhary initiated the process for dramatic and radical changes. The decade of 40s had witnessed many groups and association marking their entry into the art arena. In 1944, in Madras, was founded the Progressive Artists' Association considered to be one of the oldest and most active art association in the South. This body eventually played a pivotal role in organizing exhibitions, publishing artists works and their biography. The organization hence became an important tool for making art popular and acceptable within the conservative bastions of Madras and provided space and visibility to many young and aspiring artists.

From mid 40s under the pioneering efforts of K.C.S. Paniker and S. Dhanapal, the pedagogy at the institution turned modern looking towards Europe to provide the necessary impetus. The 50s was a period of great excitement within the newly emerging nation when various grants and fellowships made possible trips, and residency in Europe and America. But this was a short-lived euphoria, because by 60s it became imperative that to be authentically Indian in its arts required an establishment of its identity on similar terms. These daunting moments were crucial for the young and emerging art of modern India particularly in this decade - a moment that had valency for all the Indian artists to assert their individual identity within the paradigm of internationalism. This predicament had its repercussion on the Southern region resulting in an opportunity of beneficially negotiating its regional historical and local culture to advantage. And such a conjecture meaningfully advanced the shaping and configuration of the Madras Art Movement, with its constellation of group of artists, heterogeneous in their composition.

K.C.S. Paniker heading the Art Institution from mid 50s initiated a shift towards a "modernist" formalistic exploration, which privileged a non-mimetic style to bring in a new visual awareness

among the students. By late 50s when an identity crisis was felt among Indian artists, Paniker directed his attention towards melding 'modernist formulations' with Indian traditional art forms. Partially his efforts were designed to reduce the influence of the overworked stylistic modern expressions from Europe and partly his own experiences of showing abroad where his works had been commented upon by Ludwig Goldschreider, the English critic, for lacking an 'Indian' feel. These different factors set in motion a discourse on ethnicity with indigenous culture getting prioritized. By privileging the local culture and classical regional art forms Paniker aspired for "an art Indian in spirit and world wide contemporary".

By taking a posture that was both regional and national he was reacting to multiculturalism within international circuit that allowed for maintaining a status quo with other cultures. Largely a move in this direction also attempts to dismantle the role of neocolonialism by New York centric American art. Neocolonialism I refer to as hegemony [as much in culture as in politics] in art taken on by America particularly in its movements of Abstract Expressionism and Post-painterly abstraction. Institutionalised by Clement Greenberg this formalist modernism had strongly impacted on the art of Indian artists in its euphoric post-independence phase. And it is this partial attempt at reducing the heavy influence of abstraction in the decade of 60s that was instrumental in turning inwards to Indian tradition and culture, effectively rethinking its cultural signs for 'authenticity' to mould or shape the character of modern Indian art.

The criticality of these moments proved productive, to a group of emerging talented artists from Madras. Within the pan Indian milieu Geeta Kapur says, "there is a good reason to recall that the modernist project was engaged in an affirmative art of desacralization; it was engaged in a decoding and secularization of the works of the past and present"⁴. Kapur's comments of 'desacralization' and 'decoding' were indexical in her text for the construction of national modern, in which consideration of regional modern is given inadequate representation for debate or to acknowledge this facet of India's pluralistic culture. Nevertheless the imperatives confronting the Madras Group enabled the artists to band together under common agenda in desacralizing and decoding regional cultural art forms. They became instrumental in constructing or giving rise to a phenomenon of what is described as 'regional modern' which stands apart from national modern but in tandem with it vigorously inscribing plurality of Indian culture. Thus the Madras Group euphemistically took to appropriating, reinventing and hybridizing local/regional art forms in the early 60s. This resulted in the selective eclecticism creatively arbitrated by the individual artists to suit his expression within the local milieu. But this valorization was

conditioned by the exigencies and contingencies as mentioned earlier of identity crisis faced by Indian artists that enabled a capitalization of canonical and traditional art forms. The socio-cultural milieu hence lent valency to the emerging program of nativism initially in Bhasa literature that became the by word also in painting and sculpture in the 60s.

IV

Nativism was an attitude or an outlook enabling to situate works of art that would reveal cultural affiliations. Nativism in language or and vernacular/ 'bhasa' literature was a phenomenon of the 60s that shaded into art as well. It was an alliance for empowerment and self-assertion of regional or marginalized groups. Contextualizing the Madras Group within this frame of reference, wherein, privileging its creative and imagined activity on values of indigenous and local cultural resources, it engendered a different character not only within the pan-Indian consciousness but also within international modernism. "Nativism" as an ideological construct hence served to resist American hegemony and allowed for a charting of an individual tract that visibly allowed the mapping of "Indian" identity within mainstream internationalism through Third World reality/consciousness.

The regional political party namely the D.M.K. with its strong adherence to linguistic nationalism defining the parochialism inherent in such a move was marking its presence as political nativism and peculiar to Tamilnadu in the mid 60s. Simultaneously cultural nativism was a phenomenon witnessed within the country, intensely negotiated in bhasa literature as well in varied fields of knowledge in its post-colonial phase. This was a strange coincidence of cultural and political nativism running parallel, though for Paniker who headed the institution his political affinities were not with the regional party. Paniker's studied move in the direction of regional cultural traditions were borne out of his personal experiences in the West, disenchantment with overworked stereotypical modernist formulae and the exigencies of creating 'authentic' modern Indian art and a status quo with other cultures. Thus "nativism" as a construct within the Madras experience enabled a heterogeneous character of the art movement [since not many within the group aligned their ideologies with nativism as the artists Munuswamy, Alphonso Doss, Bhaskaran, among the most prominent displayed in their works] and also allows for a debate to define this terrain or site as the "regional modern". This nativist construct was responsible for the valorization of regional ethnography [racial, cultural, and tribal], which generated local knowledge, and within the Madras Art Movement specifies or signifies vernacular and tribal

culture, and historical dynastic affiliations. Hence in the 50s and 60s nativism became a site for politically honed sets of choices.

Paniker who had initiated his imaginative and experimental creative ventures [i.e. completely denuding the pedantic romantic Westernism of Roy Chowdhary's curriculum] in the pre-independence era had an outlook and perspective that largely had collaborated with nationalist ethos i.e. in rendering pastoral landscapes inspired by scenic rural Kerala. In the Post-independence phase, he reacted to the post-partition debacle by rendering themes on humanity as the 'Blessed are the Peacemakers' 'Humanities' et al. But it goes to his credit to have effectively and appropriately moved away when the contingent exigencies arose to articulate modes of expression in a different visual tract/language. And this was the mobilization of the artistic resources derived from vernacular sources at this juncture in the 60s.¹

The visualization hence of the modern from within the regional frame and its narrative implicating an institutional infrastructure was thus important. This clearly establishes the potent and manifest role of the art institution in becoming a main player for the emergence of an art movement from the city of Madras. Undoubtedly D.P. Roy Chowdhary had prepared the groundwork towards this process and K.C.S. Paniker carried the momentum forth. Many senior artists who had formed the core group that eventually materialized as the Madras art movement have supported this argument.

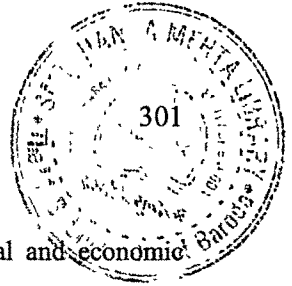
V

At this juncture it becomes important to highlight those crucial factors, which led to the marginalization of the Southern artists in the formative years of the modern art movement in India. This could be placed firmly on the prevailing apathy in the carefully designed art education curriculum under the imperial regime. Madras School of Arts and Crafts one of the first colonial established art institution [1850], had been identified particularly as a 'craft institution' because of colonial cultural politics and its pedagogic agenda. Thus it had been targeted purely for craft production and its serious repercussions rippled on the development of 'artists as creative individuals' in metropolitan Madras till late 1920s. It was under the regime of D.P. Roy Chowdhary in 1929 that a fine arts curriculum was established and a move made towards developing in the students a perceptual and empirical sensibility. Also partially conditioning its lackluster exposure was the disinterested public who was largely inclined towards dance and music and showed no predilection towards painting and sculpture. The glaring lacuna

of a commercial art establishment till mid 60s when Sarala Art Gallery was started was another decisive factor that disallowed promotion of arts. The only patrons as indicated by Krishna Rao, Redappa Naidu, Anthony Doss, Santhanaraj and other senior artists were the members of foreign embassies located in Madras who largely appreciated and encouraged them by purchasing it. The media's role was negligible since it paid inadequate attention to artists creative representation by not publishing favourably or reflected ignorance or inability to comprehend modern expressions.

In metropolitan cities like Bombay and Calcutta the colonial established art schools had played a constructive role in the emergence of 'artists' in the modern sense of independent creative individuals from the period of nationalist struggle. Though Bombay and Calcutta had these art institutions it did not serve as a site or locus for the emergence of the modern movement. In Bombay the Progressive Artist Group established in 1947 was a loose confederation of artists with a common agenda of reducing nationalist character in the arts and seriously looked to Europe for appropriating their stylistic formulae particularly of Post-impressionism and Expressionism. In Calcutta it was Shantiniketan [and not the colonial established Government College of Arts] that developed a modern approach to arts by conflating and integrating the modernist approach with inspiration drawn from the regional folk and tribal arts like pat paintings, kantha embroidery and terracotta sculptures.

Supporting the artistic agenda were émigré artists from Europe consequent to the World War II, whose strong presence in India in various metropolitan cities helped in pushing the creative program on a different tract leading towards an awareness and acceptance among the public. Bombay was a commercial hub, and the politics of art and general educational pedagogy from colonial intervention had served in creating elite artists among Indians who occupied a preeminent position in society. Art galleries, art patrons, literati, publishers et al banded together to create awareness of new trends in modern Indian art. Since Bombay was a cosmopolitan commercial hub it also became a main player in marketing the art works. In conjunction with the media that was positive and favourably disposed, it enabled projection of avant-garde ideas of the artists in their publications. Rudy Von Leyden wrote extensively on the local situation in Times of India, Bombay in the 50s and 60s. Similarly in Calcutta Lindsay Emmerson wrote in the Statesman and Charles Fabri in The Statesman, Delhi. In contrast the Madras based Dr. James H. Cousins unfortunately could not go beyond the early phase of the Bengal School in his journalistic art writings.



The center [Delhi] peripheral [Madras] relational distance besides its political and economic down sized roles, [politically Tamilnadu was raging a separatist war with center based on language and economically the state had not established its industrial presence] also takes into account the absence of strategic cultural institutions and lack of media interest to mediate constructively and productively towards a healthy recognition of the contribution of South Indian artists within national milieu. Operating at the center was the infrastructural organizational politics. Apex cultural organizations were located in Delhi. The Central Lalit Kala Akademi was founded in 1954 and The National Gallery of Modern art was also founded in the same year. In 1955 the Kumar brothers founded the first commercial art gallery. Delhi being the political and cultural center was the focus of all activities. The two main organizations, namely Lalit Kala and NGMA had representatives from various centers in India. And the executive posts held by artists in these organizations tended towards politicizing the visibility of the artists from their region as Redappa Naidu had bitterly and critically noted. Though the South Indian scene was exciting and in ferment, unfortunately very little was known outside because of the various factors discussed. It was Paniker who as the Executive member of Lalit Kala Akademi Delhi in 60s, attempted to project the Southern artists through exhibitions organized every year both in Bombay and Delhi and largely bridged the North-South divide. In this context Paritosh Sen had this to comment about the South Indian artists [meaning Madras] whose refrain was “Chalo Delhi”.

VI

A critical analysis of the painted expressions of the group of artists that forms the constellation within the Madras Art Movement reveals two categories/strands. One inclines towards the abstract forms and the other towards figurative investigation to mediate their creative choice. Within these two categories, a commonality of line, color and textures is shared by all of them. Not only the formal elements that clearly defines their psyche, but what emerges is the cultural agenda that systematically scripts their paintings. This is to imply that though the works are abstract or figurative, there is a strong cultural influence derived from local sources as the accouterments in the performing arts, iconic deities, folk and tribal narratives, floor decorations or *kolam*, epigraphical inscriptions, textile traditions as *Kalamkari* and puppetry.

The native/indigenous tradition though required no ‘travelling’ [to use Said’s terminology], nevertheless, became dehistoricised and assimilated in the domestic or local environs. The arbitration exercised by the artists in his creative drive precipitated the act of individuation. And

this sign is the significant marker of modernity. With no compulsion of religion or ritual and a hiatus from such social practices, the artist was free to roam independently in this terrain of indigenous art arena and make his judicious selection. Paniker delved into the charts made out for horoscopes and the *tantra* symbols. K. Sreenivasulu adopted the folk art idiom as his personalized expression and Sultan Ali similarly mined from folk and tribal traditions. Haridasan moved in a spirited manner to make his art a signpost of the tradition of *tantric* symbols and *yantras* or magical geometric diagrams. Viswanathan's ideology juxtaposed with philosophy of 'I am nature', as well appropriating his 'body' as yantra are equally significant. Redappa Naidu, Anthony Doss and Alphonso Arul Doss effectively arbitrated through the iconic images of deities, and as well made productive use of Christian, Buddhist and Hindu iconography. The notion of non-realism, the ideology of picture making foregrounding the elements of design and experimental techniques, the deployment of binaries such as modern vs. traditional provided the group of painters in Madras to engage in a new language of art. For vocabulary of art is made within the man-environment nexus, where man is the feeling man and environment living.

The artist-teachers employed from the tenure of D.P. Roy Chowdhary, particularly H.V. Ram Gopal and Krishna Rao, served as effective teachers and their contribution is noteworthy. This particularly so, since, Ram Gopal was an artist adept in his creative manipulation of line. In his teaching he allowed for a total autonomy, whereby the student without the imposed limitations could explore and evolve his own idiom. This has weighty implications particularly for this institution, since it was heavily dominated by the persona and the western romantic ideology of Roy Chowdhary. Krishna Rao on the other hand with his water-color painted ruralscapes, devoid of any implicit romanticism enabled an opening of a trajectory, in which the element of light and the cultural environment became the mainstay of his works. It was this dimension of cultural environment with its emphasis upon the temples and their ubiquitous gopurams in various southern towns of Madurai, Thanjavur, Kumbhakonam, Ramesvaram, Tiruchi among others that later would yield results when consciously cultural forms would be brought into active service for a larger concept titled 'nativism' or 'indigenism'. Nativism configures to seek articulation of ties in a specific region, which could be ethnic, cultural-linguistic or artistic. Within the Madras experience this could be explained as commingling of subtle nuanced cultural differences based on linguistic parameters within the four Southern states, when students from these regions studied at the art institution in Madras carrying memories of cultural and historical art forms. By projecting their creative expressions as a happy blend of formalistic modernism and vernacular art forms, they effected a movement, which saw many artists marking their individual signposts.

The emergence of number of artists from South becomes particularly relevant in the 60s, negating the attitude of certain artists in Delhi whose arrogant views inflecting ignorance that there were no artists from the South except of course Roy Chowdhary and Paniker.

Paniker translated the nativist ideology and yet addressed issues through his intervention into mainstream national art both pre-Independence and post-Independence. And though the exigencies of the time led him to excavate traditional, historical and folk and tribal art forms, these strands of regional culture only enhanced the richness of the modernity of Indian art. An agenda of this nature also makes for a strong case of resisting overt modernism inscribed within the sensibility of the Indian artists. In this respect, mediating through his position and power as the head of the institution he brought to bear upon the younger students and his colleagues to effectively transit from the dependence wholly on the west to their own variegated diverse culture. In his predilection towards Jamini Roy's works derived from folk and tribal art forms, Paniker was able to reduce the illusionistic dimension making it particularly noteworthy since he effected the change through cultural intervention of an art form that had been marginalized by the colonizers as subaltern. Through a gradual process of experimentation and exploration he divested his canvases of figurative imagery and it led him towards his celebrated Words and Symbol series in 1963. This series established Paniker's reputation as a national artist, in the way he synthesized the regional vocabulary with other art forms that effectively could be labeled 'Indian'. His works are neither completely abstract nor figurative, so they could be categorized as quasi abstract. Noteworthy is the fact that Paniker could never establish a complete non-figurative idiom, precisely because he was reacting to the neocolonialism in art of the American Abstract hegemony. And it is to dissociate from this trajectory that traditional and local culture was strategically valorized. Through acts of cultural intervention, specific to contingent needs Paniker largely manifests what today can be viewed as postmodern sensibility. Or the regional modern seem to prefigure the postmodern.

VII

The group of artists within the Madras art Movement could be referred as 'eclectic' in their choice of arbitration as K.G. Subramanyan comments concerning 'eclecticism' in modern art and which has particular relevance to the Indian art scene. "The literature of a civilized society carries many cross references, the arts of today carry many 'image quotes'; and with substantial widening of the avenues of creativity artist indulge freely in the cultural jaywalking without any

fear of criticism or remonstrance”⁵. The cultural interaction consciously opened up tract of emotional indulgence configuring space for assimilation and adaptation of different regional art/cultural forms investing the Madras Group with heterogeneity that proved beneficial and productive.

For the figurative painters the notion of the enduring image became a centrality, enabling them to employ and express form at will in consonance with two-dimensionality of the canvas. These artists beginning with Sultan Ali visualized a private dialogue within them and organized their pictorial spaces that were derivative of Indian miniature’s aesthetic space. Sreenivasulu’s individuated stylistic expression was within the cultural grid, inspired as he was by the mural tradition of South India, namely the Lepakshi murals as well as the wooden toys and puppets of Andhra Pradesh. The artist teachers particularly L. Munuswamy and A.P. Santhanaraj robustly explored the versatile line as an expressive tool. During early 60s within the art institution, the discourse on line pervasively and persuasively dominated the argument influenced by nativist ideology [affiliation and relation to one’s culture]. Line as a tool for expression and communication was debated and inspired analysis of the number of books as part of colonial collection within the institution on decorative ornaments, derived from the study of temple art for application on various artifacts created primarily for the market needs of imperial regime. Reinforcing and supporting the ornamental linearity was the scrutiny of dynastic sculptures of the South namely Pallavas, Cholas and Vijaynagar styles. The historical study added valency towards the support of line ensconcing within it the possibilities of creating a distinctive/particularized identity for the Madras Group.

More enduring however was the effective melding of craft and artistic processes as stressed by Paniker who wrote in 1966, “It is a thin line that divides a great painter or a sculptor from a great craftsman... there can be no art without craftsmanship”. Paniker in the revised curriculum that he initiated laid stress on the study of various traditional crafts valorizing the knowledge of artisanal skills through this craft involved curriculum. These disciplines included, metal works, woodwork, jewellery, metal engravings, batik, terracotta, ceramics etc. By stressing on crafts, Paniker was adding value in privileging line to become dominant. This can be explained by the fact that in the traditional production of handicrafts the dominating character producing desirable results as an ornamental artifact or object is its detailed decorative patterning. These effects arise out of the linear quality of the motifs that is utilized for creating a jewel like appeal. Thus the academic ambience at the institution buttressed by its craft centered curriculum enabled the conscious

emphasis on line generating a meaningful dialogue with this element that was prioritized by the artists working towards various experimentations.

It is in this context that Munuswamy and Santhanaraj the two pioneering avant-garde teachers artistically employed linear modulations to mark their individual styles. These two artists having the commonality of linear style marked a posture of difference within the group when through a voice that was not particularly regional, but with a broader vision and outlook, encapsulated the international artistic character within their expressions. Munuswamy had indulged in sourcing his select imagery from western modernists like Gauguin and Paul Klee. While Santhanaraj's experiences synthesized artistic resources from Ajanta and Thanjavur murals in a creative assimilation.

Redappa Naidu, Anthony Doss, Alphonso Arul Doss, K. Ramanujam, S.G. Vasudev, R.B. Bhaskaran, Muralidharan, C.Douglas, Arnawaz, Premalatha Seshadri, T.K. Padmini's artistic statements are conditioned by the linear inflections. Desacralization of images largely conditioned and configured the idiomatic vocabulary of these artists. In their figurative narrative, it becomes interesting to observe how individually these archaeologed pictorial idioms weave into the syntax that constructs their art language. Redappa in working through the Indian iconic forms such as the 'Devi' and 'Ganesha', as well illustrating the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana divested it off its religious and ritualistic aura to constitute a modernist vocabulary. Since the place of religion is problematic within the modern space and the sacred is evacuated, dissociation from this particular field enabled Redappa to manipulate the desacralised images to his advantage, and opened up a tract that allows the reading of his works as postmodernist.

Vasudev on the other hand was influenced in his art language by the poetry of A.K. Ramanujam and D.S. Bendre. Working with various media like theatre, literature and craft oriented discipline such as metalcraft, and silk tapestry weaving; Vasudev's embeddedness in various regional forms both literary and artistic makes for an interesting study. Bhaskaran's unacceptance of the nativist paradigm projected his individuated vision through concepts of evolution and creation. His visual language was based upon imagery that nevertheless was sourced from rock-cut cave paintings and the tribal art forms, juxtaposed and integrating with naïve spontaneity of child art. He is one among the several artists who has worked on a number of themes.

Ramanujam's oneirous imagery culled from his subconscious projected vicarious joys of living. His surrealist vocabulary derived from fantastic and imaginative film sets, chartered a different trajectory, vibrantly texturing his immense contribution within modern Indian art and simultaneously enhanced the heterogeneous character of the Madras Group. Muralidharan and Douglas coming as they do in the post-Madras Movement i.e. in late 70s channelize their creative output in directions that is both traditional and innovative. The former deriving his ideas from myths and tales evolves cryptic diagrammatic abbreviations, which augments the regionalism dialectically within national mainstream in the late 70s and early 80s. Muralidharan reacting to iconic forms of deities also gestures towards popular appeal when he parodies the form juxtaposed with written text, largely appropriating the graffiti culture. Though creating mass appeal through popular mythic icons like Lakshmi, Hanuman and Ganesha, it is indirectly through them that Muralidharan makes visible the kitsch in stressing on popular garish colours that is the ubiquity in Tamil culture. A regional interpretation of this nature inscribes a reading of his postmodernist sensibility, since he negates formalist intervention and allows popular taste to take precedence.

Douglas's sensibility is dualistic playing upon modernist and postmodern calculations in his attitude and approach to his creative expressions. There is an element of nomadism and a feeling of rootlessness, since he lived the better part of 80s in Germany and returned again to Choolamandal Artist Village in early 90s where he continues to work. His technique of creasing the paper, renting the canvases and suturing it, applying layers of mud and other materials to create textures indirectly relates to this existentialist aesthetics of modernism. His insistence on reading his text/paintings applying the notion of the Barthesian text, as open to 'play', without being forced into one or universalized meaning makes for the possibility of the open endedness of the reading and re-reading of his artistic expressions as post-modernist.

VIII

The abstractionists within the group namely Munuswamy, Viswanathan, Adimoolam, Gopinath, Achuthan, K. Damodaran, Akitham Narayanan, Jayapal Panikkar and Rm Palaniappan among the most prominent intellectualized their concepts through cultural signs. Abstraction within the Madras Group makes for interesting reading. Munuswamy who subscribed to the international view, expressing his indifference to the proselytization of nativism by Paniker, evolved his stylistic vocabulary within the paradigm of mainstream internationalism. His gestural abstracts mediated through the body of the female form, allows for interrogation of his formal vocabulary.

Viswanathan, Gopinath and Achuthan reinvented the memories of cultural signifiers from their hometown of Kerala. This attachment to roots significantly has led/precipitated for these diasporic artists a fragility of reaching to their cultural signs. This association/dissociation is dialectical for developing their concepts, when it attempts a retake, based on cultural derivatives sourced from their original location, serves to relive the collective memories with freshness, offering a vision, which they effectively abstracted as individual expressions. Marking a posture of difference, within the Madras experience they visibly enhanced the character of art movement within the national as well international mainstream.

Adimoolam's abstractions are metaphors of naturescapes, in which the moods of nature correspond to human emotional states. Palaniappan, the younger artist coming in the post-Madras movement has mainly negotiated with the graphic medium to translate the scientific dimension of the universe through his abstractions with mathematical numbers and alphabets as well plans and elevations employed by architects as architectural readings.

The Madras Group hence reflects and consciously evolved a heterogeneous character due to the individual preferences of the artist to work either in figurative or abstract, in nativist or international art language, thus amply negating any homogeneity that may have arisen because of the nativist agenda. The perception and perspective of each individual artist makes for a cause to deliberate and reflect upon. Though nativism as praxis provided the commonality of bringing many talented and creative artists together, within this framework, each artist evolved his individual vocabulary and language to mediate his expressions. And it is this approach that provides for the distinctive character for the movement as a whole. Indirectly these parameters also allow for the negotiation of a regional character since the sights and sounds of its culture and the configuration of its geography makes visible a different character in the entire Madras group. This creative integration of local knowledge with modernist approach underpinning exploration and experimentation both materially and conceptually scripts the duality of modern vs. traditional, conservative vs. progressive, leading to the emergence from the extremity of the peninsula of an art movement that reinforces plurality of Indian culture that democratically finds acceptance within national consciousness.

Though postmodern is problematic within Modern Indian art, the cultural differences visible in India's pluralistic traditions makes for the case of postmodern indirectly through cultural models and nationalist traditions, which were synthesized without any forms of rigour. Within the

Madras experience the cultural vangurdism was conscious attempt to transgress and resist the overt western modernist agenda that had become integral to modern Indian artists sensibility. Through a cumulative process of valourization of regional cultural forms synthesized at a particular moment in country's contemporary milieu namely the decade of 60s, it indirectly allowed for configuring the definition of postmodern sensibility. It did not permit radical shifting of terrain as it happened in the West, rather adjusted or and approximated the Euro-American approach to the contingencies of its contemporary moments. The problematic of postmodernity within Madras Art Movement nevertheless remains; requiring scholarly intervention to provide another set of reading with perhaps another set of philosophical approach.

Endnotes

¹ Geeta Kapur, When was Modernism Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India, [New Delhi, Tulika, 2000] 307

² Burton Stein, A History of India, [New Delhi. Oxford University Press, 1998] 237

³ Romesh Dutt, The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age – From the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 to the commencement of the Twentieth Century, Seventh Edition, [London Routledge and Keagan Paul Ltd 1950] 76-77.

⁴ Geeta Kapur, When was Modernism Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India, [New Delhi, Tulika, 2000] 323

⁵ K G Subramanyan, The Creative Circuit, [Calcutta, Sage Publications, 1992] 25