

## 4 Globalisation: Contemporary Indian Art

In the study of tracing the impact globalisation has had on Contemporary Indian Art, we first began with understanding the very phenomenon of globalisation. The demarcation of the economic form of globalisation as the one of relevance to contemporary Indian art, resulted in fixing a specific time period to take under consideration. With this the other forms of globalisation, spread over centuries, as discussed in the first chapter were ruled out. From the 1980s the spread and intensities of interconnections and interdependencies of various nations was considered as the prime character of the drastic changes. Majority of these changes had a causal factor in the economic, political and technological transformations that came about. Therefore, in defining the concept of globalisation we focused on it through or as, the *processes* that brought about changes. These changes were palpable in various manners. Firstly, beginning from having definite - physical spaces or as entities, which could be considered as *nodes* or nodal points catalysing such transitions; and the other of the building a networked mesh which would support the earlier mentioned *processes* of penetration. This could roughly be looked at as a map showing the spread and extent of the network connected through the nodes or points of transitions.

The said aim of these economic-political and technological changes was of bringing in a sense of equality amongst various nations. As we moved to state the socio-cultural impact of these changes it was evident that there were many un-said aims too, which came to the front through *manifest forms*, as multiple realities. Yet the claim for open participation and single pedestal remained the slogan of further integrations. Bringing us to the question asked earlier if the world has really turned flat; questioning the optimistic outlook of Thomas Friedman.

Our approach began with more objective intentions, while defining globalisation, in a near chronological manner. Then moved to a more subjective understanding of the socio-cultural implications it had. The simultaneity and the multiplicity of the socio-cultural actuality attested the contemporary condition

as a postmodern globality; where notions of provability, truth or falsity are substituted by relativity and contingency. In the section on the Indian art market, we traced the multifaceted transitions that came about from the late 1980s. It brought forward questions related to the notion of the autonomy and subjectivity of art, which under the capitalist influence find financial translations, forming the markers of its worth. Even as global movement and circulation of artists and artworks took a rampant form in the liberalised backdrop, the constant reference to the place of origin of the work put a question back in centrality – which is of regional specificities and their subsequent historic, traditional, social, bearings on the artists and the works. This evidently highlights the shortcoming of globalisation, as boundaries still do matter.

Having evidently rather realistically gauged the distance from the utopian globalised flat world, our methodological concern while analysing the impact of globalisation on the Indian contemporary art, shall be as undertaken earlier. As of first - gauging the *nodes* and *processes* and the extent of spread of the global networks in the contemporary art scene, and shall also deal with addressing *issues* which characterise the existing contemporaneity. These shall help establish the relation of the notions of practice, participation and the modes of reception to the creative entities. Thereby, giving a holistic picture of - the spaces or nodes and processes of circulation – the crucial part of the global circuits, parallel to the methods and manners of presenting works. Before we move to analyse the contemporary scenario, a backdrop of the pre-liberalised era along with the immediate post-independence era, shall help as a pointer for comparing not a linear change, but of tracing the ideological intents.

#### **4.1 The Pre-liberalisation and steps towards the Global Pedestal**

To gauge the impact globalisation as an economic phenomenon and later a socio-cultural outcome on Contemporary Indian Art it would be necessary to understand the character of the relevant time periods as they existed before these changes took place, and also after they were largely palpable. From the very beginning we have considered the time period of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, that is, the phase of economic liberalisation in India as the entry point to



understand globalisation; and have provided backdrops to understand the reasons, manners and processes that brought about the drastic and large-scale changes. In the first chapter on economic globalisation, we went back to the period of Bretton Woods Conference of the 1940s to trace the transition, with proof that these happenings had drip irrigated globalisation. Though these events were separated by a few decades, one has to take into consideration that the scale at which the ideological integration of various countries towards their economic stands took place would certainly not be a process spanned over a short time. Most of these countries had to shed the longstanding belief systems which they had adhered to, either willingly or forcibly. The same was followed with respect to the socio-cultural changes witnessed globally and those with a special focus on India. The movement of people, creation and re-creation of diasporas, the globetrotting individuals, establishment of the transnational businesses, advent of consumerism and commodification, etcetera, explained the transition from the modern autonomy towards the plurality, relativity and contingency of the postmodern globality.

Similarly, a look through the more defined changes of the Indian art market, a term which itself came into colloquial usage in the phase of global influences, gives an idea that the art market had a strong relation the earlier two parameters, which invariably had an impact on the artists too. Since the current chapter deals with the impact of globalisation on the practice of art making, exhibiting, reading, presenting and of its reception at a global level, we shall first need to establish the ground from which it moved ahead. It would be erroneous to say that it - departed, as more than a sense of a break, a sense of continuity is evident. Further on having stepped in the global arena, the practitioners of art – be it artists, writers, critics, curators, art historians, etcetera, faced a new challenge of locating and identifying the respective works in the larger de-territorialised circuit.

Therefore, in this section we shall begin with reading the early attempts of the need for an identity formation in the pre-independence phase, moving to the post-independence phase with the artists of the nascent nation striving to make a mark. This followed by the decades exhibiting the establishment of new

schools, ideological developments, and various new explorations, having tones of progression, dialectic questioning and some of absolute autonomy. The same shall be traced till the decade of the early 1980s after which the need is to define and trace the influences of liberal global factors on Indian art.

#### *4.1.1 Formation of a New Country*

It is a difficult task to decide as to how much should one backdate in order to give an appropriate backdrop, and create a good grounding to understand the changes that took place in the post liberalisation phase in India. As discussed in the first two chapters, one of the problematic, rather tangled understandings has been that of ones 'identity' and its 'reading' in the globalised world. On one hand globalisation aims for shedding the same and promoting the notion of the 'global citizen' and 'de-territorialised' individuals and in the process of doing so grants cognisance to the existing diversities. This contradiction is valid only when the very initial or original identity of any given entity is well defined; such that a stark change, adoption or an imposition can be evident. The polarisation then becomes traceable, as an outcome of the happenings between the two or more entities in play. The same needs to be seen with respect to India and Indian art practice. In the pre-independence period for India, what existed was the actuality of being the 'oppressed colonised' entities. Then the notion of the nation was still distant. Even as Indian art flourished, prior to this period, it is during the independence struggle that one gets to see works of art which aimed at defining the 'national identity'. Therefore, we chose this period as our entry point as we build the ground and a backdrop to globalisation in the field of visual arts. The aspects related to the reading of works of contemporary Indian art shall be done in the subsequent sections.

The nationalist sentiments came to the forefront through the works of the Bengal School artists. The conscious rejection of the western realistic style taught at the art schools established by the British, and the strong *revivalist* need of returning to the historic past of the country for inspiration, was an intentional move aiding the assertion of one's independence in terms of existence and identity. It also reflected the vehemence, a rejectionist stance towards the

colonial aura. The inspiration towards the stand was taken from the politically charged *swadeshi* movement. Interestingly the quest to define the nation and the national identity can be seen in Abanindranath Tagore's *Bharat Mata* (Figure 4-1). A figure transformed, from a traditional spectacular goddess to a near ascetic, with weapons emblematic of the then contemporary needs and strengths of the people. Evidently these works had a decidedly nationalist tone and a function to fulfil. Here the choice of mentioning about this single work is because it successfully encapsulates the intent, the ethos and the ideology of the period, thereby standing emblematically.

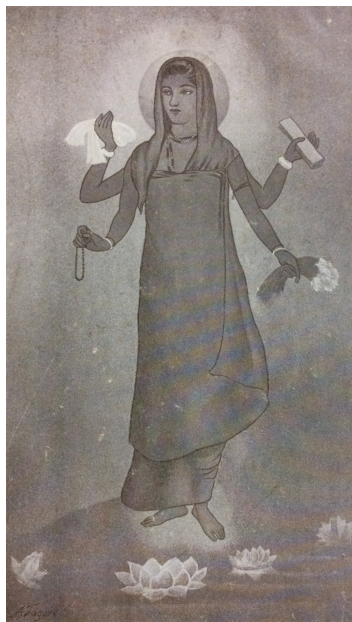


Figure 4-1: Abanindranath Tagore, *Bharat Mata*, 1902

Similarly, in the early 1940s during the calamity of the Bengal Famines and later the *Tebhaga* movement, the artists made works to cater specifically to express the criticality of the condition, through politically charged notions along with humanistic concerns. This was the time when the Quit Indian Movement was gaining momentum, resultantly leading to harsh repercussions. During this period, various supplies were diverted to provide for the war front. It was extremely tragic as there were mass deaths due to lack of food and the hoarding of grains.<sup>1</sup> Many of the artists reacted to the incident. Most of them adopted different styles while creating works based on these two happenings, and later resumed to their regular and individual styles after the completion of the

purpose. This in a way proved that the artists had consciously chosen to address these events through an appropriate manner; proving that it was the concern and the need for addressing the issue which was of priority over proving ones' artistic mark. For the famines, it was the tragic tone expressed through social and humanitarian concerns, which could be seen through *Hungry Bengal* series of Chittaprasad Bhattacharya; whereas for the *tebhaga* movement it was the optimism which came forth. Therefore, it was clear that the artists had adopted different styles intentionally, to address these happenings.

#### 4.1.2 Towards Internationalism

As we progress towards the 1940s, plural and at times conflicting voices come forth. Unlike the Bengal School which looked back at the notion of roots, aiding to rebuild the national identity through its historic past, the Calcutta Group (1943 – 1953) aimed at a more international presence and the need to move away from the sentimentality of the past. This could be understood through their motto,

Art should be international and interdependent...But during the past three hundred years the world outside of India has made vast strides in art, has evolved epoch-making discoveries in forms and techniques. It is absolutely necessary for us to close this hiatus by taking advantage of these developments in the western world. (Mallik, 2003, pp. 81-95).

The group stressed on the development of style and form over that of a singular nationalistic style. Interestingly the artists speak of closing a hiatus – an evident gap between the western and the Indian practices, by taking advantages of their developments. This indicates the incessant need to be at par with their western contemporaries, by taking due cognisance of their works, and exhibiting a capacity to do so. The same could be seen in the works of Prodosh Das Gupta. Even as the artists took an internationalist stance the content was still fed by local and at time nationalistic themes. Works like *Food Queue* (1944) and *Clamour* (1948), also titled as *Jai Hind*, reflect the same. Even as

these evidently show the modernist material and mass-volume experimentation, and a tendency towards exploration of the very basic form, at no point does it lose the eloquence. The less literal human bodies, too convey the content efficiently. In the first work, gestural animation efficiently hints at the pathos and suffering of the hungry destitute; whereas in the second one, it is the spirit and the energy of the people which expressed through the body stance. This was also the time when various other groups had or were in the process of making a mark. Another group of artists had formed just prior to the Calcutta Group in 1939, named the Young Turks.<sup>2</sup>

These artists too supported the internationalist ideology. At the same time the establishment of the new bodies like the Lalit Kala Academy and the National Gallery of Modern Art provided an impetus not just to the local artists but also to the craftsmen. During the same period the Progressive Writers' Association was formed in 1934 in London, the Indian People's Theatre Association in 1942 in then Bombay and the Progressive Painters Association, in 1944, Madras. The entertainment industry of the films too had striking examples of social realism. For the newly formed country, having borne the scars of partition and the subsequent riots, the common man's life became the centre of their concerns. The protagonist was no longer a larger than life hero but a common man.

With the earlier discussed Nehruvian era with its aim to transform the destiny of the country towards prosperity, provided a different way of thinking. The need to rectify the existing and rebuild the new, with a progressive ideology was considered as the tenets of the life in the independent country. Resultantly this was used by most of the artists to bring about changes in the then existing and presumably hegemonic institutions. This can well be understood through the views of F. N. Souza the founder of the Progressive Artists Group, who vehemently spoke against the Bombay Art Society and the Sir. J. J. School of Arts. At the same time his belief in collaborative effort and of the association of similarly inspired individuals was reflected through his words,

Ganging up with the best and the most vital among us seemed to be a solution. It is easier for a mob to carry out lynching; and in this case, we found it is necessary to lynch the kind of art inculcated by the J. J. School of Art and exhibited in the Bombay Art Society. (Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives*, 2001, p. 42)

The PAG did mark the establishment of the militant modernist and an internationalist stance. Along with the artists of the PAG, others like Prodosh Das Gupta, K. C. S. Paniker and some artists from the Delhi Shilpi Chakra were deliberately aligning themselves to the western oriented modernist sensibility, there was a constant search for the authentic, national identity (Panikkar, 2003, pp. 113-125). This attitude was coupled with the practice, where the artists were not restricting themselves to a specific region or indigenous manners of working, their explorative tendency could be identified in the plurality of their approach and also of traversing spaces. Majority of these artists had exhibited widely not just in India but were also making a presence at the international level.

#### *4.1.3 New Perspectives and Global Representations*

At the same time by the 1950s Baroda became a dominant centre with the then newly established school and the first few batches of artists making a mark as practitioners. The Faculty of Fine Arts, Vadodara or Baroda was one of first schools of fine arts of the independent country and also first in the country to offer an undergraduate degree course in the field of fine arts. It had become the merging ground as various first-generation pedagogues who came from different places and brought along with them different approaches which proved an enriching experience for the students. Ideological and practical stands from Santiniketan, J. J. School of Arts and then what was called the Bhavnagar-Rajkot school could be traced. Pioneers like Markand Bhatt, Prodosh Das Gupta, N. S. Bendre, V. R. Amberkar were the first generation of teachers, and practitioners in their respective capacities created a wonderful space for the students. Having had a working presence at an international level their vision

was not shackled by any rudimentary ways. These sentiments were expressed by Prof. Ratan Parimoo in a commemorative article on N. S. Bendre,

Individual ‘creativity’ and thinking, as projected by the many revolutionary artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, were almost unwritten slogans – an attitude inculcated also by the introduction of Art History of various world cultures in the teaching programme. For the first time there was an art institution which did not worry about trivial pedestrian art lessons but made ‘contemporary art in the making’ as the vision for the young students. (N. S. Bendre, *Profile of a Pioneer*, 1991, p. 73)



*Figure 4-2: N. S. Bendre, Sun flowers, 1955*

An eclectic approach was evidently adopted as the teachers pushed towards developing individuality through their works. Bendre himself was closely associated with the members of the PAG and was a proponent of a non-insular approach. As a practicing artist himself, then he had successfully interpreted Cubism to befit his working temperament (Figure 4-2). During this period, along with the international modernist vocabulary various artists explored the indigenous elements of the live folk and tribal traditions. Unlike the Bengal School which aimed at the revival of the roots, now these artists were borrowing from these traditions in terms of material understanding, craft skills, pictorial options or even as a combination of the visual and text or story

combination, to fit their contemporary visual language. K. G. Subramanyan was one such example who had successfully explored and amalgamated these tendencies in his works. Some artists who experimented with the Cubist language and the folk or tribal traditions were Jyoti Bhatt, Shanti Dave, G. R. Santosh, Triloke Kaul. Ratan Parimoo's works exhibited a strong inspiration from the Jain paintings. These were the early explorations of the artists in the 1950s and 1960s after which their works evolved in various directions. Then under the aegis of Bendre, the Baroda Group was formed. The young artists would exhibit their works in a group show, as a first taste of practicing professionals.<sup>3</sup> Another group which later gained importance was Group 1890,<sup>4</sup> led by J. Swaminathan, which aimed at the autonomy of aesthetics. Swaminathan's inclination was towards exploring a spiritual and the metaphysical thought, whereas for some other member it was the expressiveness of the western modernist styles that seemed suitable. Interestingly it showed the tendency of many artists to look at Indian philosophy and towards ones deep psychic responses. Many artists during this period consciously explored the notions of indigenous. G. R. Santosh and Biren De, made Neo-Tantric works, with unique forms, and a play of light and colours. This was also witnessed through works of S. H. Raza This could also be traced in the Manjit Bawa's works, not through pure abstraction but of iconic forms. Further for these artists, the visual forms and their connotations with Indian philosophy and also the explanatory titles of the work stated the sources.

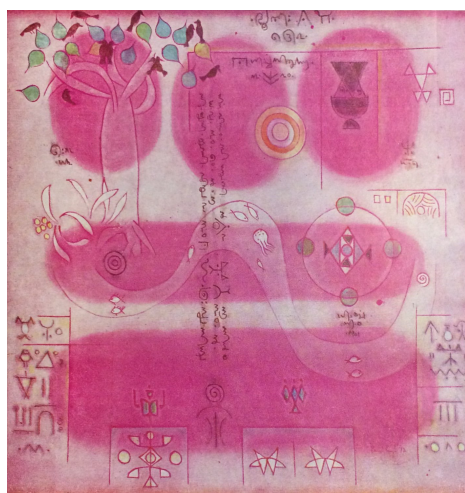


Figure 4-3: K. C. S. Paniker, *Crow*, 1972



Other attempts could be seen from artists like K. C. S. Paniker, who created a play of words, symbols and imageries to create abstract works (Figure 4-3). The aim was not of conveying the actual content but of creating a strong visual impact. To the young artists of the Baroda school, the indigenous provide a dimension to explore, but in the case of Paniker, he was convinced that the Indian artists would have to cater to the Indian-ness through their works, to make an honest work reflecting one's identity, even while borrowing western methods.

Similarly, J. Nandagopal explored the traditional techniques through geometricity and abstraction. Jogen Chowdhury included the iconographies and tried to bring them to near ordinary forms. These attempts of addressing the indigenous were not as much an outcome of asserting the 'political national identity', as they were of self and individual expression, based on ones' roots. It is important to mention that the 1960s also witnessed the establishment of the Choramandal Artists' Village. This commune helped augment the modernist tendencies in the southern part of India.

By the 1970s a look at the works from the Baroda School marked an emergence of a different tone. The notion of actuality, that is, of the lived reality was coming to the forth.<sup>5</sup> The expressive quotient was seen through a literal visual narration. Gayatri Sinha in her essay titled, *The 1970s – Simultaneous Streams* (2003), speaks of three unplanned yet interconnected manifestation. One, of the institutions and activism, the second, of appearance of curatorial initiatives and finally of select individual definitions for subjective possibilities in art. While defining the happenings of the 1970s she also includes those of the 1980s as continued by various artists. The activism is explained through the protests against method of selection of the artists for the triennials organised by the Lalit Kala Academy. This was also voiced through the magazine initiative of G. M. Sheikh and Bhupen Khakhar, *Vrishchik*. The individual subjective expressions, through the engagement of the artists like Bhupen Khakhar, through addressing of the personal aspects and those creating a near debate between the local, traditional and the international. In case of Khakhar the sheer need to break the barrier of the Fine and High art. In works of G. M. Sheikh,

the amalgamation of the lived reality with the influences of the mystical aspect of the miniatures. Further locating the city as a source and also a space of political expression, as seen in *City for Sale* (1981-84). Sinha also exemplifies through works of Nilima Sheikh, and her series titled, *When Chapma Grew Up* (1984), or those of Arpita Singh attempts at tracing the feminist concerns through these two artists.

The curatorial practices as explained through the initiatives of Geeta Kapur, through shows like the *Pictorial Space* (1977), *Place for People*, in Delhi and Mumbai, (1981), *Contemporary Indian Art* (1982), London. Taking a cue from the catalogue write-up of *Place for People*, Sinha states in her essay, that,

The expression of both ‘sensibility and ideology’ was excavated in multiple streams. Artists of the 1970s reflected on the growing federalism of India with an identifiable regional art, drawing on local artistic traditions and literature. This period of the early 1970s and the 1980s is critical in locating voices of dissidence, a multiple quest for inspired sources and links laid in art to Indian social polity. It also marked a rapid transition of ideas from a generalised suspicion of internationalism and an exaltation of Indian artistic values, to an active attempt to locate Indian art on an international map. (The 1970s - Simultaneous Streams, 2003, pp. 129-130)

It is evident that even as these decades exhibited a dichotomous rather polarised opinion towards internationalism, the decade of the 1980s exhibited the need to make a mark at the international level. This coupled with the beginning of the post-liberalisation era, marked a drastic leap for Indian artists towards the global platform.

## 4.2 Globalising Effects: The Global Nodes, Networks and Functional Processes

Globalisation as a process has been explained elaborately through various aspects. Any further elaboration may seem like an evident repetition. The same, now needs to be understood with respect to contemporary art, that is, the artists, art works, the spaces of exhibiting, the bodies instrumental in the movement of these entities, and primarily giving predominance to the way artists have addresses the various concerns and characters of the globalised world. This certainly takes a position of prominence, as it stands as an outcome of the globalised society and culture. In order to do the same, we shall borrow the earlier followed framework, a near map if can be called. First, of understanding the notion of geographic / political boundaries, which globalisation aimed at dissolving. Such that our first section looks at the *space of movement*, the borders, or interim junctions, which in the contemporary times, become spaces of defining ones' identity. Then we shall analyse the concept, of the pillars of the globalised world – the *nodes* on which the contemporary world converges. These are predominantly the metro and megapolises. In this section we shall see, how these spaces underwent transitions, be it topographic, demographic or as mental concepts. Along with the same, we shall explore the notion of the locals, as individuals living in a place, contrasting the concept of de-territorialised transnational. The aim is to understand a broader picture, beginning from international boundaries, and converging to the urban spaces.

Then we shall trace the manner in which the two pillars of globalisation have contributed to the formation of the global *networks*. These two pillars being – the liberal economy and the ICT revolution. These two factors, having largely impacted the socio-cultural fabric of the world, provide various artists, a variety of issues and tools to look into and adopt respectively. These have become the primary threads of the intricate web of globalisation. This connected existence also made individuals react to incidences, happenings and humanitarian causes that have been witnesses, regardless of the proximity of their impact on oneself. With the benefit of being connected, various artists have been able to comment on the *humanitarian concerns*, born out of what can be

called as a universalising sensibility. Given these interconnected networks, as characteristics of the globalised world, we shall then understand the *networks connecting the art world*. This shall mainly focus on the spaces through which the art works are presented to the viewers, circulated through various venues and finally contextualised and re-presented in a different light. With this we shall trace the rise of the large-scale shows, especially the biennales, and the curator as an influential entity. The current chapter therefor has to be understood as a product of three main elements, the primary nodes of global activities, the networks connecting and influencing the same, and the manner in which the artists have responded or included these influences through their art works.

### **4.3 Spaces of Movement: On the Boundaries**

To understand the global project one needs to see how the very notion of boundaries, be it geographic or political, play a role in defining the identities of individuals as they constantly cross over them. The facilitated movement of people across nations, has provided scope for understanding notions of heterogeneity and identity as a dichotomous phenomenon, and at times as a merging one. This is valid especially with respect to the diaspora and the transnationals. As seen in the second chapter, the notion diaspora, and the process of re-diasporisation, brought about a considerable change in the character of the movement associated with it. To simplify the matter, of the elementary changes brought about by globalisation, the choice and ease of movement across borders stood prominently. The pain, trauma and forcible displacement associated with the earlier understanding of the diaspora found substitution. Given which, the problems and stigmas associated with one's identity were no longer a threatening factor. Thereby, allowing one to retain it, without any sense of threat, inferiority or hesitation. When reading this scenario in terms of visual references or visually identifiable characteristics, it could be said that the identity, when not intentionally hidden, speaks and exhibits its presence. Thereby, making it necessary to understand the play of the visual

references as they contribute to the retention of the identity and also of its possibilities of movement.

#### 4.3.1 *In Transit*

When addressing the notion of the migrants, the borders become the line which demarcates or positions, their identity. The act of crossing over brings about the drastic change. The significance of the politico-geographic line and the process of crossing it are not just instrumental in formation, re-formation and construction of their identities at the host-land, but also critical to the manner in which they are received back in their homelands. Subodh Gupta in his series titled, *Saat Samundar Paar*, 2003, literally meaning – Across Seven Seas, looks at this very notion of movement, through the physical process of the same. Gupta has worked with the notion of identity within the country through regional connotations, which shall be discussed later. He has a predilection for finding the common, found, and the most obvious and ubiquitous references in the process of understanding or constructing identities. Due to which the obvious, ignored or the taken for granted elements find presence in the visuals. In the *Saat Samundar Paar* series (Figure 4-4; Figure 4-5), he tries to identify some typical features of these – migrants, immigrants or of the regular travellers. Through a simplistic approach, he looks at places of transit, which are teeming with the subjects of interest. Characterised by peculiar visual references, Gupta depicts them as a mundane, obvious and predictable actuality, and yet presents them in a new light.



Figure 4-4: Subodh Gupta, *Saat Samundar Paar I*, 2003



*Figure 4-5: Subodh Gupta, Saat Samundar Paar IV, 2003*

The quasi photo-realistic images of individuals from modest backgrounds, find presence in the visual space. The visual spaces are filled references to the places of transit and travel – taxis loaded with luggage, shuttle buses awaiting passengers to board, receivers eagerly waiting for their family or friends to arrive, with their backs towards the viewers and facing the exit of the airport terminals, individuals hugging the just arrived travellers. The individuals somehow are less dominant, both in terms of visual space and in terms of elaboration. They take a subordinate position in comparison to the luggage, which becomes the subject of observation. The attires of the individuals, their skin tone, and the elements in the background clarify their identities as Indians. It seems as though Gupta captures them in their casual stance, unaware of the presence of the artist. The lack of facial details, or facelessness could also be looked as a lack of personal identification, or as the individuals representing the face of any travellers. Here one is reminded of the faceless mannequins placed in garment shops, to represent non-specificity and the metaphorical face of all. These individuals stand, rather wait as though about to depart or for someone to receive them. Further he strikes a visual play, by trying to explore and draw meaning from the luggage of these travellers.

The garish colours of the synthetic bags, evidently duplicates of big international brands – like Nike, as shown; similarly, stark wrapping material tied on to the luggage with plastic ropes, hint at the non-elite status of the travellers. Similarly, the words / text, written on the brown cardboard boxes,

mostly of electronic goods, used as substitutes of bags declaring international destinations like – Dubai or Riyadh. Based on the conclusions drawn from the manner of packing the luggage it is evident that these destinations are not of the locations with white collared jobs for these travellers, but mostly those welcoming the less glamorous ones.

Here Gupta doesn't intend to form a conclusive visual, by narrating the details of the happenings, or by defining the emotionality associated with these locations of arrival and departure. The taxis are either loading or offloading the luggage; people either coming back or going. There is no certain conclusion that can be drawn from these works, but that of the evident, obvious and intended sense of flux; which is symbolic of the movements across the borders and instrumental in understanding the contemporary global networks.



*Figure 4-6: Subodh Gupta, Vehicle for the Seven Seas, 2003*

Through these works Gupta looks, not just at the visuals of packed luggage; but the manner of packing according to him these become a symbol of one's roots. It is only the jarring presence of the airport luggage trolleys that make it clear that the place of transit is a space of international air travel (Figure 4-6). These works were made at a point when the economy in India was showing positive signs. Then the rules and hurdles for international travel were relatively lower. There was a sudden rise in the non-intellectual jobs in various countries. International travel had become affordable with the rise of competitiveness of

international and domestic low-cost airlines. A look at these works, and the near poetic title – *Saat Samundar Par*, across seven seas, brings back the notion of homeland and memory, as though about in the olden times. Yet he also portrays the positivism with the possibility of the other than privileged lot getting a chance to make their fortune. In a way proving that the notion of ‘privileged’ no longer needs to be coveted. He attests this by making a larger and glamorous version of these symbolic trolleys, through the sculptures. Made from brass the yellow sheen of the trolleys grants it a monumentalised and beautified status. These are adorned with luggage which resembles softer matter rolled in vinyl sheets. With these works the artist strikes an irony with the attractive glossy sculptures, which carry the luggage of the non-elite. Had these works represented the privileged lot travelling with the appropriate luggage, then the images would have held a sense of obviousness, or would have turned into a literal image. The inclusion of the not so privileged class inverses the picture, and provides a different image of the global movements.

Moving beyond what is considered by the artist as major junctures or junctions of identity definition, he explores the more human aspects of such movements, migrations and circulations. Even as the migration of individuals mark a physical process, to the artist it is accompanied by an assimilation and movement of one’s own culture and even habits along with the moving entity. As discussed in the second chapter, that the diaspora carries along with them the symbols, cultures, rituals, habitudes and traditions along with them to the spaces of destination. These might not hold the same-ness or originality as the way in which they were preserved and practiced in the homeland; nevertheless, they travel along. At the same time, in the spaces of destination these are looked upon in a different light. These in the destinations are foreign elements which help coin the identity of the followers or practitioners.

*UFO*, 2007, metaphorically represents the obvious notion of the foreign entity to a particular destination and of the most ubiquitous, mundane at the homeland (Figure 4-7). The UFO or literally the Unidentified Flying Object, constructed from *lotas*,<sup>6</sup> or round water pots, usually made from metal, symbolically represents the influx of individuals coming from other countries.



Here the ‘flying’ could well be substituted by ‘foreign’ too. Gupta nearly picks this lack-lustre, mundane object from Indian homes, especially having reference to the villages and rural homes, and conjures them into a lustrous sculpture. Shiny brass pots are welded together, to get a form of an UFO. When viewed individually this vessel, immediately provides a reference to its place or origin and the utilitarian aspects. By choosing the ones with a heavy shine, Gupta in the very first place withdraws it from its utilitarian purpose. The shine could be a depiction of the prosperity Indian economy experienced in the post-liberalisation phase. The functionality is further withdrawn by welding the objects together. From a distance, they look like small circular balls. It is only on a closer look that the object is revealed. These smaller objects which had a taken for granted presence in the homeland, suddenly become foreign entities in the destination land; which have imaginatively flown into the host country. The smaller objects highlight the local habitudes and the entire form highlighting their exteriority and foreignness.



Figure 4-7: Subodh Gupta, *UFO*, 2007, Brass utensils

In similar light Gupta’s series titled *Faith Matters*, 2007-2010, the artist looks at the notion of individual cultural baggage. As is his ease to handle stainless steel and brass objects, Gupta replicates the scenes of transit, as a sculptural version. He refers to the spaces of movement and displacement, through the conveyor belt carrying luggage. A decimated version of the belt carries on it, not luggage, but *dabbas*, metal tiffins. Again, like *UFO* this work too has the gloss of the unused and unspoilt metal. These tiffins are other referents of the habits carried by one. These could be emblematic of the toiling

classes which follow a monotonous, predictable work pattern, as they strive for a better life. The act of an employed person carrying a lunch box to work; or could also be of the inseparable culinary traditions carried by the migrants or people along with them. The presence of the conveyor belt, tall towering piles of the tiffins, resembling temple towers, and the slow predictable movement, brings forward contrasting feelings – one of the monotony of the repeated motion and the other of the glamorous attractive assemblage of the objects of daily use. At one point the referent is withdrawn from its regular function and visual obviousness, granting it a status of an outsider entity.

Gupta has a childhood background of belonging to Khagaul, a village in the state of Bihar in India. Now the artist lives in Gurgaon, Haryana, near the capital of the country. He has experienced the transition of the lived space from the rural settings to those of the bursting metropolises, palpable with the icons of urbanisation and modernisation (Subodh Gupta, 2009). Given the same Gupta's transformation of the symbols of domestic to the spectacular, are emblematic of the transitions, which to him have been intimate and thickly interwoven as a part of his personal experience as he moved through these constantly altering spaces. The transformation of these local traits into the international nodes and centres of circulation is seen through these works.

#### *4.3.2 Identity and Identification*

The process of global movement has evidently been a matter of curiosity. With the increasing intensity of the same and the consequential rise in the immigrant-emigrant status for many the notion of identity plays a crucial role in the notions of acceptance, rejection or co-existence of the now heterogeneity. As Subodh Gupta speaks of the manners of identification with respect to individual possessions and captures them at nodes of movement, the other aspect is of the identification of the very individual. It deals with the building up of a context and also presumptions based on the first sight of the individuals under consideration. Literally speaking the 'the first impression' of the individuals one sees, even before striking a conversation or any form of interaction.

To Koumudi Patil, the exteriority of a human, expressed specifically through the skin forms the primary ground for such deductions. Her work titled, *Wrap Your Skin*, 2009, addresses the notion of the play of the sight, the retinality, which at times is governed by preconceived notions about things over factual realities (Figure 4-8). The artist poses in the work, covered with a cloth, with only the eyes left uncovered. In some pictures, she gazes straight at the absent viewer, at times stands with a low cast, gazing downwards. In the world with increasingly porous borders, the concern regarding the ‘other’ has been gaining increasing importance. To her the skin becomes the first ground of visual contact and thereby of deriving conclusions. The colour and texture of the skin, now becomes a parameter to determine the regional or biological origin. At times acquired features also play a role in determining the non-biological affiliations – like religion. The physicality of the other, coupled with the preconceived notions of the decision maker, takes prominence over the reality.



Figure 4-8: Koumudi Patil, *Wrap your skin - I, II, III*. Photograph on archival paper

This is best understood in terms of the diaspora. Where, as discussed in the earlier chapters, the hyphenated identity, that is the dichotomy of the place of origin and the other of the acquired one, are always at opposition with each other. The American-Asian, or European-Asian, barely blend into singularity. The insistence of the latter through the physical appearances, does invariably highlight the difference. Such that even on being a citizen of a country which is not the same as that of one’s origin, brings in the notion of the outsider. Patil

also states that acquiring characteristics of the land of the host, doesn't suffice for one to move into the realm of acceptance. One can draw a parallel with these attempts of acquiring a different identity as a genuine adaptation, or pretence, disguise, to the Call Centres of the multinational and transnational companies, where individuals mostly from the Third World countries were given voice training to sound like Western citizens. These individuals were to be acclaimed for their capacity for successful deception. At the same time, a visual or the image of the same individual would shatter the deception and bring in a sense of incongruence between the speech and the appearance of the individual.

Patil also tries to express the notions of discriminations associated with the first glance, as to how the 'gaze' is trained towards concluding and acting based on the same. In another work titled, *All skins are Equal but some skins are more Equal than others*, 2009, she states,

Skins follow a caste system which is based on a rigid implicit hierarchy of value. Therefore, some skins are more important than others though biologically they are equal- that is it is a covering of the human or any other body that is made up of multiple mesodermal tissue.

And yet some skins are purer than others. Some skins are untouchable. Some skin can be stitched into a ball others can only be sewed to be healed. Some skins can be used as a covering over other skins. Some skins can be sat upon. Some skins have a restricted entry... (You are Getting Under My Skin, 2009)

This inequality suggests a casteism of skin that projects some skins as purer and superior to those of the others.

Evidently a take on George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, 1945, an allegorical novel. In which Orwell states, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others. (Griffin & Orwell, 1989)"<sup>7</sup> The same can be understood with respect to the aims of globalisation towards equal participation, a single

pedestal approach and the highly hypothetical notion of a 'global citizen'. This work stands as a direct comment on the hypocrisies and the practical shortcomings, based on human bias and preconceived notions of the insider / outsider status.

#### **4.4 De-territorialisation and the New Geographic Tropes**

The global project, having a multifaceted impact, affected cities or what could be considered as the nodes of global networks in a spatio-temporal way. The reduction of distances due to the interconnectivity and reduced barriers was one aspect dealing with the notion of space. On the other hand, it changed the actual spatial logic of these cities through topographic changes, which were brought about by new transnational structures and cutting edge infrastructural technological development; and the other of dimensional expansions of various city limits. At the temporal level, the round the clock connectivity with other global counterparts, broke the barriers of the temporal hurdles. And the other most important change was that of the projection and prediction of the cities, as they would transform in the future. For example, many countries were labelled as 'emerging economies', or 'rising cities' hinting at the process of their potential for upscaling and the current status of still being underdeveloped, unexplored or that of concurrent progression. The other was of a projective sense, a crucial aspect which nearly assured the - to be greatness of specific geographic locations. The notion of 'future global cities' or 'the millennium cities' fed the psyche with the potential of massive growth in a projective sense.

As stated in the second chapter, globalisation has invariably been bound together with the notion of a 'need for spectacle'. This could be in terms of presentation of the truth, as was the concern of Baudrillard, with the very notion of truth being suspicious, in a world dominated by mediatic images; or as a sheer matter of an overpowering collage for Giddens, for the informed viewers. In both the case the multiplicity and the repeated projections contributed to the notion of the spectacle creation. With the urban spaces being engulfed by the same, the actuality and the physical transitions in the urban and globally connected spaces transform themselves as holders or hosts to such spectacles.

With the metropolises acting as nodes of connectivity and as structures of power, their presence and importance in the global project is nearly inevitable. At one level, it could be said that these are the spaces where the influence of the local tends to get assimilated or modified to a more transnational character with relative ease. This coupled with the financial intent and a capacity provides an apt combination for the projected dreams of the cities of the future, with the notion of a spectacle to actualise. A note of these transitions can be seen in the field of art. One, of the need to represent these cities, through exhibitions, or of turning them into venues, again bringing us to the notion of the 'future or major' art cities of the world; and the other, in which various artists have responded to these changes and have articulated them through their works. This could evidently be traced in the rising number of location oriented exhibitions especially addressing those of the so called third world, or the decolonised countries, or now fashionably tagged or marketed as emerging economies. Somewhere or the other an incessant need to place these spaces in the global arena and temporal line was surfacing. The same has been discussed in detail in the section titled, Large-scale Exhibitions and Indian Art.

In the earlier chapters, we saw that there was a constant focus on emerging geographic areas like South East Asia or sub-Saharan Africa or on countries as entities with unexplored potentials. In terms of art practices, such regions or countries started playing a crucial role. The fact that geographic regions or countries evidently had a heterogeneous character and wide disparities, the cities seemed to content this disparity to a large extent, especially by possessing spaces or pockets, which had numerous bodies and individuals actively involved in the field of art.

#### **4.5 Global Nodes**

The metropolises and the recently coined term of megapolises, play a crucial role in the globalised phenomenon. The interconnected world seems more interconnected at these nodes of global networks. A space where the global traces are palpable at various levels. The governmental and corporate

liberal policy implementation, affecting the businesses at a larger level; and for the citizens of these nodes, at a personal level, through the new opportunities of employment and the character of employment patterns, structures with a near uniform character, the substitution of the old small-scale businesses by large conglomerate chains, and many such transformations as seen earlier, which brought about dramatic changes in the city-scapes and the minds of its residents. In the first chapter, we discussed the general and larger changes that took place, now we shall see how these changes had a cascading effect on the life of the people; and also proved as issues for artists to address. Since our focus is on understanding the metropolises as the nodal points of application and activities related to globalization, we shall trace the same by reading the notions of the physical space itself and the other of the lived experience in these nodes.

One such physical change in the metropolises, was that of the transformation of its earlier existing character. For example, the city of Bangalore / Bengaluru, being transformed in to an Information Technology City, with its glass façade buildings, skyscrapers, exponentially risen number of international businesses, business parks and the residential structures, etcetera, which brought about a standardisation of build forms; the earlier character of being the Garden City, seemed like a historic past, a mere memory.<sup>8</sup>

Most of such rising cities in India faced the same formulaic growth through the infrastructural activities – construction of flyovers, metro ways, express ways, new international airports, or restructuring of the old ones, establishment of ‘templated business districts’ – sharing identical looks in different cities, development of new cities, erstwhile satellites of metropolises or interconnecting sites into transnational business town – like Gurgaon and Noida, and most importantly spread of the residential areas beyond the limits of the city. The changes were undertaken to claim the status of the World or Global Cities. Majority of the metropolises in India have been making desperate attempts to achieve the Alpha, Beta or Gamma status, as listed by The Globalization and World Cities Study Group and Network (GaWC), norms (Chacko, 2007, pp. 132-33). One cannot reject the need for these ‘upgradations’ within the cities, but these changes came at a huge cost and massive

manipulations. Such formulaic urban planning and development, contributed to similar problems to be faced. Making one wonder that was such a standardised approach, of bringing about homogeneity within and amongst urban spaces the only solution towards progress in the contemporary world. Even as such questions pose a doubt towards the changes, our primary concern is of noting the actuality and the process of the change, through the works of art; which itself stand as critiques of the current situation.

#### 4.5.1 *Changing Topographies and Varied Voices*

When writing about or around the concept of a city, and trying to relate it to the presence of an artist within it, one is inevitably reminded of Charles Baudelaire's *flâneur*. A modernist entity, moving through the urban areas with an observant eye, blending in the crowd yet managing to maintain solitude; attesting Balzac's concept of the 'gastronomy of the eye', by absorbing and relishing what the spaces and sights provide, unlike common walkers, who even after seeing them, without taking due cognisance of anything would just pass by. It could be said that with the global postmodern reference the duty or the undertaking of the *flâneur* doesn't change, the observant eye and the moving through spaces still holds valid; but what changes is the character. If one equates the role of an artist with that of the *flâneur*, it is evident that it is no longer that of a mere urban dandy, dressed well, rummaging through the urban spaces, but the one who observes and comments on the now existing pluralities and polarities; and the gastronomy of the eye now takes a critical dimension. Of the stark changes in the city, as discussed, the one relating to the physical transitions of the city-scapes has engaged many artists. Few have responded to specific cities with a defined backdrop, whereas some have looked at the generalised concept, by withdrawing specificities, thereby defining it as the general phenomenon or fate of most of the global cities.

Globalisation has to an extent been characterised by a near nihilistic tendency where the city as a space and a living entity become nodes and targets simultaneously. The notion of nodes can be understood as the necessary connecting junctions and targets in the sense of spaces where the nihilistic



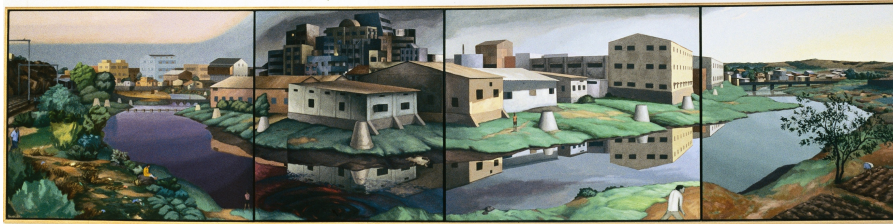
character finds manifestation. In an attempt to trace these manifestations, Sudhir Patwardhan's works present both an up-close and a distanced view of the same. The cityscape and the pockets, people and professions, within it become the prime spaces for him to build up, not necessarily a story but a visual to voice the actuality of the people and the spaces of their interactions. At no point does the artist try to create a romantic or an emotional account of the same, but undertakes a rather rational stand. His engagement with the city, specifically of Mumbai, as an observant viewer got him to read its various layers which over the years were constantly under transition. His regular travel from the suburbs to the centre of the city in the local trains, to him provided a window to the changing visions of the scapes. His work titled *Hills*, 1998 shows Cezanne-sque landscapes, with a lone white coloured house, in the foreground (Figure 4-9). The partial greenery, the absence of people and lack of detailing brings forth a sense of barrenness while giving the hills a place of focus; nearly raising a doubt, as to would this barrenness be the fate of the landscape. Simultaneously, many of his works have dealt with the increase of concrete structures taking over these spaces, as though encroaching and readily engulfing the green spaces.



Figure 4-9: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Hills*, 1998. Acrylic on canvas

An impressive and sweeping landscape is shown in *Ulhasnagar* 2001, a large four panel work (Figure 4-10). The sheer scale and the aesthetic appeal play a visual trick in portraying the reality and the picturesque landscape. When looked at from a distance it seems like an attractively coloured river meandering and encircling what could be an island. The landscape seems to be visually balanced with the central towering structures, gradually tapering towards the

ends. This at first glance it might seem like a predictable landscape of any given industrial suburbs of Mumbai; but this is short lived. A closer view provides an entry not just of the realities of these spaces but also hints at the causal factors with a consequential outcome of the hazardous present. This is an image of a township within the Ulhasnagar-Ambarnath industrial belt; suburbs of Mumbai in which the industrial and residential spaces coexist in dangerous proximity.



*Figure 4-10: Sudhir Patwardhan, Ulhasnagar, 2001. Acrylics on canvas*

To being reading the tetraptych, the extreme left panel shows a space near the railway tracts, a space carved out through the earlier existing hills of the regions to make way for the passage of trains. It is a beautiful and intense coloured scene with the purple river and reflecting the similarly intense redness of the sky, and the greenery lining it. This has a backdrop of a small open ground, could be a space for the children to play; further recessed are the relatively new concrete constructions, which too share the glow of the sky. The train tracks probably lead to a space which resembles a station, and the buildings evidently clustering near it. In this dreamy scape, a girl sits by the river, a man walks down, as though returning home or going for his job; and a few other people are placed independently. Initially it gives a near peaceful view of the space; a mundane scene from a quiet suburb. As we move to the subsequent panels the image takes a different form and nearly unfolds the truth.

In the second panel, there is an equally attractive play of colours; but this time it elaborates reality over the construction of a beautifully pleasing visual. The small industrial sheds take a larger part of the visual space. A space devoid of humans yet populated with manmade structures. The colours now turn less pleasant, with the deep sanguine red and black liquid regurgitating like a whirlpool into the river. The sewage panels and the coolant towers explain the

rush of red effluents, a red poisonous liquid; a manmade disaster into the natural scape. A thick dark line demarcates the space between the water and the land, as though some inerascable deposit. This is also the turning point, where the river curves from the blue to the red, or metaphorically turns into the hazardous. A carcass of an animal, probably a cow, floats in the dense liquid colour; a macabre sight, adding to the eeriness of the desolate space. The sky too seems to be murky in comparison to the rosiness of the first panel. The backdrop is again of concrete constructions, denser and taller, supposedly a mix of the residential and the commercial, is covered by the dark engulfing clouds. With the intensity of the colours and the barren, near abandoned space, one feels like asking, whether the space devoid of humans and barrenness, is a reality or the possible consequence?

In comparison to the second panel the third one seems more placid. Even with a similar backdrop, the lack of a threatening feeling in this image, with the more placid and blue water, the re-entering of the green space and humans in the visual. The murky sky, continued from the second panel, seems less threatening yet doesn't find its turgid reflection in the river. Rather the river seems to take a blue lightness as it distances from the central part of the frame. The final and the fourth panel takes us to a more assuring or a promising space, with its expansive landscape seamed with the hills, smaller residential structures and pastoral scenes. The patches of cultivation punctuate the scene on one side of the river. The river too turns into a natural blue body reflecting the clear sky. Even as the edges of the industrial structures, a continuation from the prior panel fringe this one, the greener and the more natural elements, dominate the scene. The lone tree nearly stands as a hope, that the earlier existing character of the terrain shall not be totally obliterated.

This work is not just a hypothetical imagery depicting the hazards of the unhampered industrial growth in the urban spaces, but is a synoptic portrait of the fate of many cities as they have grown in the post-liberalisation era. From the late 1980s and the early 1990s the liberalisation era, seen in the first chapter marked the end of the licence-raj, thereby allowing large and small scale private enterprises to come into existence. Further with the rising real-estate prices

during that period these industries found space on the outskirts of Mumbai. The Ulhasnagar-Ambarnath industrial township being one such example. Earlier these places were known for being lush green spaces, with a few residential structures and with an insignificant industrial presence; but over the period these positions have reversed.

The logic of conjuring this scene in tetrptych itself becomes self-explanatory. The river nearly guides the eye. The vibrant colours and the structures, play a visual trick, by not highlighting the break of each scene in an obvious manner. Further portrays the contrasting possibilities of the horrid actualities and the aesthetic appeal of them in an uneasy yet realistic way.<sup>9</sup> Patwardhan further portrays the contrasting possibilities of the horrid actualities and the aesthetic appeal of them in an uneasy yet realistic way. Patwardhan mentions that,

‘...at the first glance, these deeply coloured rivers seem visually attractive. I held this ambivalence, of the hazards and the beauty and aesthetic attraction. One cannot deny the beauty of it, even though one is totally aware of its destructive and damaging consequences. These are like the visuals of temporal history of industrial growth and its decaying consequences. This is very similar to the hills of the suburbs, which when lit up at night, are an awe-inspiring sight, though they are spaces which have been felled to make space for residential structure. The same could be seen as one gets a bird’s eye view of a city at night, when the streets filled with traffic and the glittering lights are a beautiful visual, though the truth is far from that, rather it is a horrid truth.’<sup>10</sup>

The stance taken by Patwardhan, evidently moves from that of a mere observer documenting the scene to using his position of an artist and a privileged citizen to raise the consequential connotations of the presumed notions of progress. His other works like *Pokhran*, 1991-92 (Figure 4-11), and *Kanjur*, 2004 (Figure 4-12), nearly show the obvious manner in which the

natural scapes are being devoured for human consumption. One could say that the city itself is being consumed. *Pokhran* which predates *Kanjur*, shows the changing phenomenon of coexistence; in the earlier one the fringe of greenery in the midst of the constructed spaces is not as disturbing as the latter. In *Kanjur*, there is an absolute erasure of the same, substituted by small hutment like houses and an under-constructed building. The bald hill stands starkly to state the deforestation activities that have been taking place in an indiscriminate way.



Figure 4-11: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Pokhran*, 1992. Oil on canvas

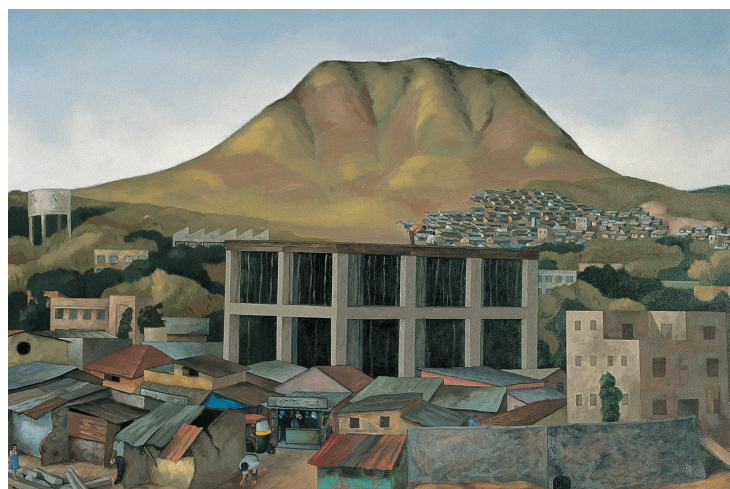


Figure 4-12: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Kanjur*, 2004

These works speak of the suburban areas which were being used and captured by the first round of constructions. As Patwardhan moves towards the city, another form of erasure, obliterations and overwriting is brought to the forefront. In *Lower Parel*, 2001 the artist looks at an area near the central station of Lower Parel, which once housed the cotton mills of Mumbai (Figure 4-13). The work unfolds the prominent phases of the historic pasts of the city.



Therefore, it is necessary to provide a backdrop over the timeline. This area was known as the *girangaon* in Marathi, literally a mill land / village / precinct, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For the colonial Bombay Government, it was a new way of gaining monetary benefits from these textile mills. A place connected by rail and road, it was ideal in-terms of logistics too. It then changed the character of Mumbai from that of a trading port-city to that of a manufacturing centre. The skyline of then Bombay was soon dotted with the massive mills and their chimneys, characterising Bombay's Industrial Modernity (Nallathiga, 2011). There was large scale migration from the rural areas to seek employment as workers in these newly developed manufacturing units. Consequently, the Bombay Development District (BDD) and Bombay Improvement Trust (BIT) built rows of low cost houses in *girangaon* area. These were congested housing solutions, with building having small residential spaces but a spacious common courtyard. These structures were the iconic *chawls*, of Mumbai.<sup>11</sup> The topography of this area consisted of the tall chimneys, wide mills and short roofed *chawls*.

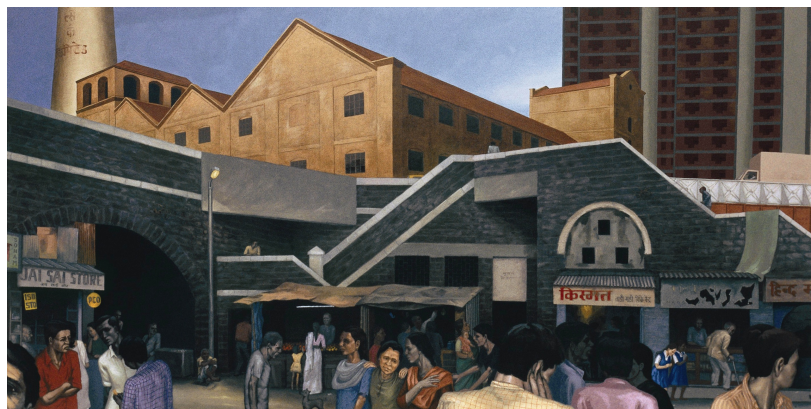


Figure 4-13: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Lower Parel*, 2001. Acrylic on canvas

After a near century long presence these mills faced competition from power looms, and in no time, were declared 'sick'. For long there were protests from workers, and the mills were decaying in an unused state. In the 1990s, the mill owners were given permission from the court to partially open it for commercial use. The underlying clause was to provide employment to the local residents.<sup>12</sup> In no time the skyline of the Lower Parel area saw the scaling of glass facade transnational skyscrapers. And within a span of a decade it turned

from the mill land into a global business district. This was further aggravated, when the *chawls* were being torn down to give way to the high rises. Some businesses made use of the earlier existing mill structures by refurbishing it to their use. The Lower Parel *girangaon* stands as a perfect example of gentrification.<sup>13</sup>

Patwardhan captures these layers of history in his work. The foreground has a dark grey stone structure of the railway station of Lower Parel; a colonial contribution. This is populated with old time modest stores, further the locals, evidently from a non-elite class, possibly the residents of the *chawls*, form the part of the foreground. Just behind the station is the impressive textile mill with its chimney towering out of the visual format. This is a second layer, depicting the history of the industrial modernisation of the city. And finally, in the background is a multi-storeyed structure under construction; this representing the contemporaneity of the space. Currently what we get to see is the parallel existence of two cultures the sophisticated elite and the congested poor. The architectures which stand as the manifestation of the socio-cultural and economic tendencies / positions, and their transformations are not just mere pointers of the disparate urban environment but are starkly stating the politics of economic dominance which has the potency of majorly altering the socio-cultural morphology of these spaces (Dhage, Transnationalism and the Transformation of Architecture of Textile Mill-lands in Mumbai, 2013).



Figure 4-14: Sudhir Patwardhan, *The Emergent*, 2012

Patwardhan reads the same visual and socio-spatial incongruity which was a result of the neo-liberalization policies through the rise of the glass façade buildings, which now have become the new face of the globalized world, and have made way into the dense and till now assumed – impervious, near to slum areas. In the work titled *The Emergent*, 2012, there seems to be a sheer play of geometricity (Figure 4-14). The differently angled roofs of the shanties and low structures, with different colours form an interesting ground from which the tall blue glass structure literally emerges. The incongruence even as is obvious now seems to have become an accustomed sight. The structure stands as a precursor to the transformation that would soon come about in the entire area around it; such that the shanties would soon be obliterated replaced by the low-density luxury structures, be it residential spaces, corporate house or even commercial structures all shall erase the earlier identity of the space. R. Siva Kumar in reference to these works states that, ‘with little human presence (except in Lower Parel) these pictures of emerging urban settlements, presented like clips from a silent film, etch poignant images of social erasures and inscriptions’ (An Extraordinary Cohesiveness, 2012, p. 11).





Figure 4-15: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Flyover*, 2012. Acrylic on canvas

To match the rise of such business districts, the infrastructural activities were undertaken. Patwardhan also looks at the infrastructural activities – building flyovers, express ways, sea-links, changing faces of public spaces all stand as emblems of change / progress. Therefore, to him, any city becomes a canvas for erasures and newer creations, acquiring an archival status with fluid boundaries. The work titled *Flyover*, 2005, is emblematic of the ubiquitous visual, which has nearly gained a temporally permanent status (Figure 4-15). The pale grey concrete, incomplete flyover seems nearly abandoned, or could be a hint that at any given point such a visual would be available in some or the other part of the city. The concrete grinder, and mounds of construction material surround it, as a man walks through it. Interestingly Patwardhan tends to zoom in and out of scenes to present the most crucial. At times, it is a close view of the sites and spaces with barely any trace of humans; as the structures get larger the humans tend to get smaller, and the reverse as he focuses on the more personal and human concerns. According to Abhay Sardesai, most of Patwardhan's works from the late 1980s onwards, dealing with the process of

building and rebuilding, ‘upgradation’ of the spaces, one gets to see, ‘the city being foregrounded as an unfinished project, as being caught in the middle of an infrastructural crisis’ (Setting the Site, 2006, pp. 26- 34).

The concerns with the global metropolitanism manifested in the rise of the towering and at times threatening structures has been a matter addressed by artists through varying ways. Just as Patwardhan mentioned about the play between the awe inspiring and the opposing reality of the cityscapes, a parallel can be drawn with the work of Dayanita Singh titled *Wall Paper Installation (Dream Villa 11)*, 2009. The placid evening glow of the city and seascape seems to be cut, or gouged out by the deep fiery stream of lights. It seems like a systematised flow of volcanic sheen. Here it could be said, that this could be an image of any metropolis, or any urban space aiming to reach that status. Apart from the identifiable characters of the city to those who know it, the visual elements in the image withdraw from its specificities; such that it is the striking lights, which take prominence, and create a space of converging reference over the identification of the city. The magnificence of the light and the darkness play together to create a what could be an aerial sight of any city.

#### 4.5.2 *Equating Factors*

Most of the metropolises being the nodes of the global networks shared the same fate. The formulaic ‘upgradation’, ‘revamping’ and ‘development’ seemed like attempts to have cities which would be clones, of each other and also of their so called global counterpart, rather imagined counterparts. For example, there was always a comparison drawn between Indian cities to resemble, New York, London, or the latest inclusion of Shanghai. To a large extent this was an unrealistic aim and a projection too. Having had starkly different historic, geographic and demographic backgrounds, any attempt of drawing a parallel was obviously futile. Most of the metropolises gained the revamping momentum based primarily on the desire of being in the global race.

The capital city of New Delhi too saw an alteration of meridian connections of transportation through the introduction of the metro project. Having had a history and large spaces with thick and dense population the lines drawn on the route maps of these metro lines meant uprooting and displacement for many. This was coupled with the general rising trend for constructions for housing and business districts. Having small, dispersed yet important pockets with historic monuments of significance, the new age technologically superior structures were evidently to take the position of intruders; if not intruders at least of the incongruent opposite.

In *City Uprise*, 2007, Gigi Scaria takes into consideration two opposing forces into play (Figure 4-16). A photograph with multiple clips, look like a film strip stacked in three columns. A historic structure, with its arched niches could possibly be one of the late Tughlaq or Lodhi dynasty structure; just as many of the monuments which can be seen dotting various parts of the capital. This structure gets a gradually rising backdrop of the towering concrete structures. Just as the historic quotient of the ancient structure is immediately visible, the newness of the latter rather the obviousness too stands out. Scaria's continuing engagement with the immediate and the social, find an expression in this work. The historic structure is *Agrasen ki Baoli*, on Hailey Road in New Delhi. Agrasen was a king and is presumed to have commissioned the building of the *baoli*, or the step well.<sup>14</sup> As one starts walking down the steps, getting inside, suddenly the structure starts enveloping the viewer into its depth, distancing oneself from the outer, rather the more recent. This to the artist is an exploration of the perspective. As one starts walking upwards, or outwards, the city metaphorically, starts appearing, as though it is nearly rising above; hinting at the possibility of the relentless growth. The artist presents this in three stratum, such that at every level there is a gradual movement towards the present, functional and the existing reality.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 4-16: Gigi Scaria, *City Uprise*, 2006. Digital print on archival paper

His exploration of the city spaces as a student and later as a professional helped to understand the different layers coexisting in terms of physical structures, economic and social strata and also in terms of the changing visual-scapes as one would traverse across the metropolis. To him the reactions of the denizens of the capital, to the construction of the metro railways as a mode of transportation symbolised this very rift. This was also the time, when India was declared as a host to the Commonwealth Games of 2010. In a fierce attempt to show its potential, grand projects were undertaken towards completion at an unimaginable pace. One of which was of the metro lines. As mentioned, these were to pass through densely populated areas, and had created a sense of panic amongst the residents who would have to be relocated from the long existing place of residence. This is captured by the artist in his video titled, *Panic City*, 2006 (Figure 4-17). The video builds a contrast, with the western classical music running in the background, with images of the densely packed structures moving to the tune, as though following the commands of a music conductor.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 4-17: Gigi Scaria, *Panic City*, 2006. Video stills



Figure 4-18: Gigi Scaria, *Amusement Park*, 2009. Video stills

A similar concept was worked on by Scaria in 2009, through a video titled *Amusement Park* (Figure 4-18). Drawing from the arrangement of children's parks with various rides and playing structures Scaria replaces them with the growing emblems of urban cityscapes and the construction activities; skyscrapers, glass façade buildings, the metro rails, large digital hoardings, flyovers, structures under construction, sparse traces of greenery, some demolish and makeshift structures populate the space. The repetitive sounds of seesaws and swings are replaced by the chaotic and deafening noises of construction machines, traffic and machinery. Some visuals are picked from the real life while some animated / constructed; the movement, lack of humans and



the overpowering of these rising structures, built a sense of unease. Unlike *Panic City, Amusement Park*, creates a deeper impact with the visual, the movement and the sound. At one point, one feels like the cityscape seems like a shot from some sci-fi movie.



Figure 4-19: Gigi Scaria, *Face to Face*, 2010. Digital print on archival paper

The constant need to be equal to or close to various global exemplars, in terms of infrastructure and the consequential haphazard modification within the current systems within the cities is seen in *Face to Face*, 2010 (Figure 4-19). Scaria looks at the rising not just of buildings but also of the various layers depicting technological progress and the zeal for the so-called upgradation of the city. The photograph provides a window to the ‘layered’ growth most cities have witnessed over the past two to three decades. He stands in the centre of a flyover, probably a relatively new addition to the city, and captures the metro rail line, which is close approaching from either side towards completion, as though the meeting point is just above the flyover. The layering is that of the old conventional ways, above which the flyovers run and now another line. The notion of vertical growth takes a nearly threatening connotation, as the humans at the ground level seem decimated. Further this top layer carries the burden of lines skyscrapers. These buildings are not structures from India but Shanghai. The symmetric placement of visual elements in the photograph, and the centrality of the merging space are like staged acts. Then the rising aspirations and unrealistic dreams of possessing a legitimised stature of a global nation, to

the artists, find manifestation in such as these. Such that the process of replication of public facilities, structural semblances and technological adoptions, followed by the government, were convincingly portrayed as a mechanism to find an equating status.

The equating element palpable in the metropolises, is looked at by Pooja Iranna, through various media – from digital works, video installation, sculptural works and etcetera. In some works, the artist looks at a direct image through photographs. Whereas in the sculptural works the sheer physicality of the effort is evident. At a formal level, she recreates the visual semblance through her sculptural works made from paper and some from staple pins. The latter material might sound different to create freestanding works, but Iranna employs the minimal effect of the material to suit the uniformity of the contemporary structures. She creates what could be called models of larger structures. Such that the work resembles an unfinished building, evidently still under construction. Even while doing so, there is no desire for an exaction of the same, but of re-creating the structure, along with the possible flaws not visible to the naked eye, or the intentionally camouflaged errors, the possible hazards – be it to the environment of the people in it, or fears and fascinations of people associated with it. It could be said that the artist's choice of the staple pins could be symbolic of its properties, of holding fragile paper together, it is mouldable, at the same time minimal in its look. Its use in creating structures could be associated with the holding together of the same, at the same time moulding it to give a delicate and fragile look.

In *The Twist*, 2010, the visually attractive structure with a golden sheen, makes one feel that it could be a building for the uber rich and would be a marvel of contemporary architecture (Figure 4-20). Three structures of varying heights placed besides each other forming a cluster, hint at the scale and grandeur of the project. At the same time a close look at these forms reveals a sort of distortion, thereby justifying the title; yet the distortion from a distance gets camouflaged due to the clustering. The play of the shadows of these individual entities reveals it directly, immediately clarifying the title. When understanding the technicality of the work, the process of interlocking the pins, balancing and creation of a

sense of flow combine to form what could be called a near rhythmic sculpture. Iranna's predilection for such near musical forms is evident in the titles of most of these sculptures made from the staple pins; like *Confluence*, *Symphony* and ones with similar references. Similarly works like *Not So Rigid – I*, and *Anonymous Growth*, look at the fragility of the structures; giving a sense of unease, such that the symbols of technological proficiency seem to be in a state of imperfections, in this case, caving or melting gradually. The grind of these structures too, resemble musical patterns. It is this fragility that the artist tries to capture, both, literally and metaphorically.



Figure 4-20: Pooja Iranna, *The Twist*, 2010. *Staple Pins*

A single channel video work titled, *We Are Going Green*, 2012, provides a panoramic growth of an urban space, populated with concrete structures and glass façade buildings of varying sizes, each nearly competing with the other to scale taller. The landscape seems monotonously bland and grey, as it fades out in the haze as it distances deeper. Evidently visuals like these have been matters of pressing concern of environmental issues and its repercussions on humans, the very creator of these emblems of progress and thereby the hazards. With the bettering of communication and information dissipation services, the transference of knowledge regarding the hazards has created a partial sense of awareness, such that individuals having sensitive inclination towards nature started propagating and following the notions of standing against such development and supporting the cause towards the preservation of nature. Even



as these bodies came into existence there has barely been any significant change. The need towards exhibiting the greatness of the global project has not dampened the rate of such growth.

Iranna looks at the positivism with a sense of hope and also highlights the hypocrisies of some measures taken towards the same. Some of the buildings get an anointment of a green liquid, which spills over them as though being bathed in it; some in the process of getting covered in colour, whereas some already soaked in it. A sharp digital green colour mocks the sane aim of bringing about an environmental balance. The very colour itself is reminiscent of some science fiction movie like, imaginative scene. With no trace of natural forms, this green-wash, highlights the manner in which genuine causes get dodged by the greater greed for financial benefits.<sup>17</sup>

Globalisation and its insistence of the inevitable project of upgradation brought specific concerns to the front especially with respect to urban space. When comparing the ways of perceiving it is evident, that Scaria draws concern towards the very specific and closely experienced understanding of the scenario. These are an outcome of his sensitivity towards the longstanding historic past of the city as well as the present of Delhi, his current place of residence. Having moved to the city as a student and now a resident, the city is now a home and therefore a space to look at with sensitivity. Pooja Iranna, for whom Delhi is a hometown too, on the other hand, reads the scenario through the lens of an artist, concentrating on the formal representation and also by de-contextualising the same. The withdrawal of any specific references to cities, could be considered as attempts of generalisation; such that this could be a state of not just a specific metropolis but of any space which prescribes to such changes. At the same time both the artists, try to highlight the aspects of sameness of the consequences depicted through visuals, as an attitude a documenter.

A more abstract rendition of the notion of cityscapes is seen in the paintings of Nataraj Sharma. Having exhibited and participated in globally for long, over the past few decades he has had the privilege of movement across various lands, which provided an opportunity for comparison. This comparison

could be understood in terms of the differences in their terrain, sizes and compositions, or as the way in which he has witnessed these individual cities grow over time. This understanding is an outcome of is individual, down to the ground level, and a personal experience of the city, as an observant artist, tourist or a visitor; and also of a physically elevated visual perspective, literally a bird's eye-view, as he would fly to or from these cities.

In a series of paintings from 2008, he looks at various cities as he travels over them. The visuals remind us of a time close to that during the take-off or landing of the aircraft. When an interesting aerial view is available. Such that one is close enough to identify some known locations – could be those recently visited, or just passed by, or popular monuments, buildings or site, and yet gets to a lot which was missed, a synoptic and intense visual. An expansive visual which is available only for few passing moments, before one is distanced due to the speed or the turns an aircraft takes. This is also a glance of the space in which the actual spread of its limits, character and the density is presented in a holistic, an all-encompassing view of the place one was just in. It could be said that this series is another way of understanding his engagement or enthrallment with flying, as seen in his sculptural installation of the *Air Show*, 2007.

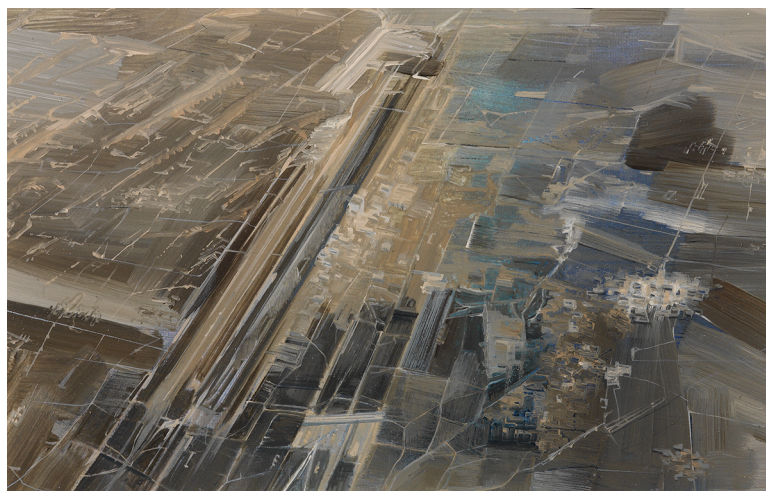


Figure 4-21: Nataraj Sharma, *Bangalore 1*, 2008. Oil on paper on table

In the series of 2008, Sharma takes a similar birds eye-view of cities like Baroda – his city of work and residence, Mumbai, Bangalore, Brussels, London,

Athens, etcetera, as he travels over them through an airplane. The aim is not just of presenting a view, but of reading the standing of these places over a time.

His paintings depict cities as he has flown over them, in the view he sees as the commercial airliner he travels in as it takes off, glides over the landscape, lands. This, more than anything, is a view on progress and the burgeoning of small towns into cities and cities into big metropolises. The images are from around the world... (Città, 2018)

With global factors the discussed need for progress has barely left any space untouched. Be it the long progressive and pulsating cities of the west, London being an appropriate example or of the historic places like Athens. These are exhibiting similar characters of change. One has to take into consideration, that Sharma through these works doesn't aim at building a reference or connotation of what has changed but looks at the similarity of the causal factors.



Figure 4-22: Nataraj Sharma, *Bangalore 2*, 2008. Oil on paper on table

In *Bangalore*, 1, 2, and 3, Sharma looks at the changing visual of the city. In the closer view, *Bangalore 1*, 2008, he presents, what could possibly be the open cultivation lands, placed on the 'outskirts' of the city (Figure 4-21). Not lush, but not even bare, segregated by occasional demarcating lines, which

could be narrow roads, lanes, or peripheries of the fields or plots. The bold strokes of paint, erase any possible chance of attempts towards identifying what lies on the ground. A central linear patch which diagonally divides the image could possibly be broad way, or a single unit, which ends abruptly. *Bangalore 2*, on the other hand is an image of the densely clustered / cluttered concrete structures, with no trace of any open space (Figure 4-22). These structures are now looked upon as entities which substituted the lush greenery of the city. Relatively detailed, the work provides an understanding of the urban character, such that the structures orient themselves according to the meridians of transportations. The central curving road, and the ones merging with it in a perpendicular pattern form the defining grid for the structures to proliferate. As one moves from the closer to the farther, the structures haze out, into simple strokes, merely hinting at their presence.



Figure 4-23: Nataraj Sharma, *Bangalore 3*, 2008. Oil on paper on table

*Bangalore 3*, seems like an abstract interpretation of a landscape, where the sky and the land – scape merge (Figure 4-23). Horizontality of the work is enhanced by the sweeping strokes. The sky with its plane glow, and the landscape - broken and dull meet at the blur horizon; evidently being a sight captured from a higher altitude. Yet one can identify the difference of the land and the sky, as the broad road, possibly a high or an express way, or the ring-roads of Bangalore divide the landscape; again, bringing us to the same picture with the perpendicular spaces merging in. Like *Bangalore 2*, the work titled



*Brussels*, and *London*, 2008, present a panoramic view of the respective cities (Figure 4-24; Figure 4-25). The Thames in *London*, takes the centre-stage like the meridian roads in Bangalore. The aim is not of placing such identifying element to provide a relevance to the city, but of presenting the as is situation. Similarly, in *Brussels*, the circular structure could be of the King Baudouin Stadium, one of the landmarks of the city. In both the works, the visual fades as it moves away from the proximal space, turning into a haze.



Figure 4-24: Nataraj Sharma, *Brussels*, 2008. Oil on paper on table



Figure 4-25: Nataraj Sharma, *London*, 2008. Oil on paper on table

For Sharma, the concern towards urban spaces in the contemporary times is a central issue. What needs to be understood is the manner of addressing the same. On one hand a direct relevance is brought about by naming the works

based on the cities itself, such that after reading the title one tries to find identifiable spots, structures and elements. And on the other hand, the creation of quasi-abstract spaces seems like an intentional tool to show the uniformity of the processes which are playing as causal factors towards their rapid transformations. As mentioned earlier, these *processes* have been of particular importance in the contemporary, transnational, globalised world, as factors bringing about changes, at times overpowering or at worse obliterating the earlier existing characters of the *nodes* of interaction and action, which are the ever- growing cities, metropolises and megapolises.

#### 4.5.3 *The Direct and Ironic*

The play of de- and re- contextualisation dominates the telling works of Anant Joshi. He shuttles between cute, attractive and unreal, and the fierce, harsh and the real with an extreme ease. Joshi's relation with cities comes about as an outcome of his shifting places and spaces of residence and work. Moving from his hometown of Nagpur to Mumbai to study at the Sir J. J. School of Arts, was the first confrontation with the notion of contrasting characters in lived spaces – be it about the differences in terms of the composition and constitutions between the two or of his involvements. The prior depicting the personal, family and the home front, whereas the latter the professional, such that the artist had to make the best of what the city had to offer.

Joshi's involvement with the city is an outcome of his student life, the commute towards the same, observing the very character of it, earlier as an outsider and now as a willing resident. This might sound regular, and nothing different from the way in which most of the artists, or creative entities experience the space around them and also if required, recreate and express their understanding about it. To Joshi this process is fed from various sources. His predilection towards toys, especially the small, colourful, portable ones, to that of the performativity some possess, the visual appeal, the material of these toys, which if mouldable, sometimes the ceramic objects or those of wood, provides even more opportunity for him to work with, all of these come together when

Joshi tries to conceptualise a work; especially when the artist deals with urban spaces.

Anant Joshi, looks at the character of the city of Mumbai. Once a colonial port town, later known for its mill-lands which flourished for a considerable period to that of a megapolis. It has always been projected as a space brimming with energy and also characterized by a competitive pulse. Joshi have lived his initial years of struggle as an artist looks at the way the city forces one, in a positive way towards being healthily competitive. To the artist, it is this dynamic character of the city which leaves no scope for stagnancy. It somehow manages to take one by surprise, very often crashing the notion of predictable and easy living. This can be evidently seen through the way in which people commute through the city, to assure a means of livelihood, this is done regardless of any natural or man-made hazards. There is also a sense of uncertainty, and danger when witnessing the growing infrastructural developments. To many critics, especially urban planners, the random growth poses huge threats to the citizens.



*Figure 4-26: Anant Joshi, Untitled, 2012. Sculptural Installation, 100 objects fixed and rotating on a 8 x 4 feet table*

In the current work Joshi did not pick predictable symbols, helping identify the city, or present it in the actuality, but created a metaphorical scape (Figure 4-26). To recreate the skyline of Mumbai he placed wooden objects having the form of firecrackers, each with a different shape and size, depicting

the varying structures. The attractive and overpowering sense of the visual appeal of these structures was attained by painting different designs and images, from various cultural and painting traditions, on these wooden pieces. The idea was to create a collection of images nearly representing a city as a centre for cultural osmosis. The attractive colours with a high sheen of these structures gave them a look of wooden toys, which every child would want to have; this could be symbolic of the desires of people to live in this glamour struck and financially lucrative space.

Moreover, these were placed very closely creating a sense of densely populated spaces, again emblematic of the dense demographics of the city. Further Mumbai, in the past decade, like many other megapolises, is known for its increasingly vertical growth, as the horizontal spread is leading to the expansion of the city limits. Therefore, these objects were placed not to create a uniform plane, but were juxtaposed to recreate the undulating and the closely packed skyline of the city. This aspect of the visual appeal and the density, highlighted the glamorous and attractive aspect of the city, which is just the skin-deep reality. Therefore, from a distance it had a calling appeal but metaphorically stating that one can never get a true picture of a city from a distance, it is always doctored. Mumbai as a city from a distance does create an image or illusion of attractiveness but a lived experience could be radically different. To prove the reality and the opposing character, Joshi, created a play of precarious. These objects were set in vigorous motion depicting the relentless and the overpowering character of the city. A closer look at the painted objects revealed that these were topped with a wick, hinting that these objects of attraction were equally dangerous, and also life-threatening. The gyrating motion of these toy-like objects, along with the deafening sound, added drastically to the sense of unease. Further the base of the work had popular images, mostly of the warnings from the fire-safety measures, and on one side of the table were images of the matchbox covers. Placing the firecracker like buildings on a table, which was in full motion, and further placing a table cover with images of matchstick boxes, was an evident hint towards the precarious positions in which the city was perched; insinuates of the potential explosive character and the constant threat looming over.



#### *4.5.4 Re-creation of the scapes and Experiences*

The notion of a character of a city or of understanding its physical actuality has been dealt with by artists in different ways. To some it is of narrating or stating the exact identifiable, whereas the other is of interpreting the same, through a re-creation of the same, but not as explicit and obvious characteristics but by presenting multiple yet partial glimpses of the same in a synoptic manner. The re-contextualisation of the drastic outcomes of the globalised world and its physical emblems, and their portrayal through works of art to create a play between the known and the 'made different', is another way through which many artists have tried to address the changing urban scapes. Some attempts have been very specific to certain cities and others as a general understanding of the phenomenon causing these changes. While reading these attempts through various works of art it is important to see the place and position from which the artists examines and analyses these scenarios and also to whom is it presented.

Hema Upadhyay, looks at the shifting points of entry and perspectives, when addressing and analysing the city in which she moved in to establish her career. Having moved from Baroda to Mumbai, after her student life, Upadhyay empathised and understood the feeling of an emigrant's anxiety. Her understanding of the same comes not just from those in a similar position like her, but through various physical spaces which have over the decades become assimilating and absorbing grounds for such a moving population. She looks at the famed slum of Dharavi in Mumbai, known as the largest slum in Asia. Known for its extremely dense habitation conditions, it has what one could say an independent functional ecosystem. This might seem as an exaggeration but the space has a variety and diversity of businesses, both legal and objectionable, and of varying sizes. These could range from domestic small time attempts of housewives to earn money in their spare time, to manufacturing units, to traders' junctions, illegal ones ranging from theft to duplications, and also of attempts of producing items for exports. It is the sheer variety of business which is baffling. At the same time, it reflects a sense of cosmopolitanism with an assimilative tendency towards emigrants from various places. The slum over

the years has grown drastically in size such that it has become a space or spot of tourist attraction.<sup>18</sup>



Figure 4-27: Hema Upadhyay, *Dream a Wish, Wish a Dream*, 2006. Aluminium sheets, car scrap, enamel paint, plastic sheets, found objects, m-seal, resin and hardware material

Upadhyay looks at the slum in its actuality. The physical space is of interest to her, as a built form and of the visual aesthetics. Her engagement with the architectural aspect of these slum-scapes was seen in her work of 2006, *Dream a Wish, Wish a Dream* (Figure 4-27). The work is a miniature version of the slum. The landscape undulates just as it does in the original, with varying levels having different forms of structures. Even as the unevenness of the land, brings about a visual variation of perspectives, the cluttering and congestion of the small homes, shanties, religious structures, buildings and the likes, come together to form what can be considered as a microcosm. The one on the edge perch precariously, yet there is reason to believe that it will be absorbed inside, when a newer structure shall soon have a new neighbour sprouting besides it. The closeness and the small size calls one to take a closer look at this decimated landscape. A closer look reveals the structures as they would be found in actuality.

Upadhyay uses the products and by-products of the very space to recreate it. Aluminium sheets, car scrap, enamel paint, plastic sheets, found objects, m-seal, resin and hardware material, all are employed to recreate these miniature structures. A temple, homes with television satellite disks on the

roofs, structures capped with tarpaulin or asbestos sheets, some better or newly constructed structures with fresh paint, and innumerable such structures, with occasional traces of passing walking lanes give a picture of the complete slum. The material used to create this work is not of the usual ones used for architectural or sculptural models; therefore, striking off the possibility of reading the work as an interpretation of the slum by a professional of a particular faculty. Further the absence of humans, withdraws the connotations of mere replication. Yet the title hints at the emotional quotient, born from the desire, a 'dream' to attain and the 'wish' of its fulfilment.

Beth Citron looks at the process, material and the concept in an associative way, stating, 'pasting miniaturized, cut-out photographs of herself onto large mixed-media paintings, the artist alternated aerial and subaltern perspectives of an overwhelmed and overwhelming city. Her work reaches beyond the visualization of physical spaces to remember the emotional and physical remnants of resettlement (Hema Upadhyay, 2015).' The process of marking, breaking and re-making, a new space in its entirety attests the detailed understanding of the space and its inherent character. The choice of a slum over the better known and more aggregable spaces of Mumbai, like the updated public areas, transnational structures, and symbols of global success, is a one of insistence. To Upadhyay, the growth of slums like Dharavi is also emblematic of the desire for sharing the fate of progress by the lower economic stratum. The belief that these nodes of progress shall have much to offer, brings these emigrants to the cities, the very reason for the artist to associate the notion of dream, desire and wish to the same.

Along with the act of making, the notion of the viewer evolved interestingly in Upadhyay's works. In the earlier one the viewer takes an aerial, birds eye view. One could go close to explore the details, yet the viewer is in the position of exteriority. The artist upturns this position of viewing in *Think left, think right, think low, think tight*, 2010. The horizontal slum-scape, is placed vertically, with two panels facing each other; the viewer has to now walk through the 'narrow lane' as though a resident of the same (Figure 4-28). The lack of humans is now reversed with the addition of the viewer within it. The

structures now project towards the viewers, cutting them from the gallery space, as they walk through the work. For Upadhyay, it is this notion of experience and participation of the outsider in the work, which brings us back to the irony of the outsider – emigrant presence and that of the local, who could be a possible citizen of Mumbai; such that this citizen would willingly distance himself or herself from the slum. The stratification and segregation becoming increasingly stark as the city and its pockets expand in tandem.



*Figure 4-28: Hema Upadhyay, Think left, think right, think low, think tight, 2010. Aluminium sheet, car scrap, enamel paint, plastic sheets, found objects, m-seal, resin and hardware material*

The engagement with cities and its smaller units has been of interest for Prajakta Palav too. Since the very beginning of her career she has focused on the aspects of human tendencies and behavioural typicality, from a personal and primary level to a larger generalised understanding. During her first solo show, Palav tried to explore the notion of ‘blemishes’ – or visible unpleasant flaws; these could be of the body, mind or of the very mentality which plays in deciding as to what could be a blemish. She begins from a basic domestic setting and moves on to trace the same at the level of the newly spreading metropolises. She deals with binaries of the suburbs and the town not as opposing polarities

but as hierarchic distinctions; such that the non-plush spaces of the city are considered as blemishes; the latter is what forms a part of our analysis.



Figure 4-29: Prajakta Palav, *Swimming Pool*, 2004. Mix media on paper

She begins through photographic references aiming at not just creating a photorealistic image but draws a sardonic tone, a comment on the stark disparities within a city. This is not just a juxtaposition of the two differences but of raising questions as one enters the more ‘updates’ living spaces, and the other gets categorised as the repulsive. In one of her works, *Swimming Pool*, 2004, sparkling swimming pool, painted in a near Hockneyish style, with crystal clear water forms the central part of the work (Figure 4-29). At the first glance one wonders as to why would one make a photorealistic image of a known sight like a swimming pool. A closer look reveals the presence of a border, which is of leaking sewage pipes. These raise a sense of unease, as it brings forth the blemished aspects. To her this is emblematic of the transformation of the many old, usable water bodies which due to industrialisation, or contamination have been exploited or neglected to turn into unusable, dumping and damaged spaces. This work could be considered as a comment on the degradation of sweet water bodies into sewage drain spaces.<sup>19</sup> One is evidently reminded of Patwardhan’s *Ulhasnagar*; though for him it was the element of the picturesque which dominated, for Palav it is the evocation of the repulsive from the blemished is

what dominates. Her understanding of the blemishes is also seen through the rising contrasts in the residential spaces of the lower middle-class and the elite. She also deals with the binaries of the suburbs and the town not as opposing polarities but as hierarchic distinctions; such that the non-plush spaces of the city - non-glamorous homes, government quarters and slums, etcetera are considered as blemishes.



Figure 4-30: Prajakta Palav, *Kachra I*, 2005. Mix media on paper

In a series of works titled, *Kachra*, garbage in Hindi, Palav paints the dumping grounds of Mumbai with utmost precision, but draws an irony of placing this *kachra* as an exhibit in a gallery (Figure 4-30). At one level Palav tries to express her personal stand by painting the garbage with a level of precision that can be equalled to that of portraiture and makes an attempt to include these blemishes as images of visual skilled perfection and delight; which brings in a sense of visual curiosity. And at the other level expresses the attitude of the masses which always choose to overlook these ‘out of place’ and repulsive spaces over the posh spaces of the cities, though this ‘overlooking’ shall not erase their presence. There is an attempt to reverse this attitude of ‘overlooking’ too. By making this garbage the very subject of her work, granting it pictorial importance and then further placing it within an art gallery, thereby intentionally, in a near forcible manner, demanding visual engagement. Now the blemish is upturned to become an object of visual and intellectual interest.<sup>20</sup>



As we are looking at the concept of re-creation in this section, the initial step towards it is of identifying as to what is being re-created and through which elements. Palav looks at what could be called as the by-products of the booming economy and the desire of individuals for an ‘ideal’ lifestyle. To her one of the by-product of the globalised economy, is a personal vehicle - a car, along with the rising purchasing power of individuals and the availability of a variety of brands, the car to her has become an emblem of ones rising benchmark of the basic needs, in a metropolitan setup. In her work *Bursting*, something seems to splash out of a concentrated centre; not radiating in a patterned or symmetric way, but chaotic (Figure 4-31). The centre resembles a meteor, and the periphery like a cracked or shattered space; or like a mosaic with small units of different colours and sizes. A closer look reveals the resemblance of the centre to that of the convoluted mass of the flyovers and the connecting ways – the urban emblems; and the smaller elements of the mosaic are vehicles of varying types, ubiquitous in the same spaces of reference. Here she uses the cars to show the overcrowding of not just the human population but presents the concentrated living in a space where every individual aims for a better standard of living and in a way, it adds to the chaos. To the artist this logic is applicable to most of the cities in the country.



Figure 4-31: Prajakta Palav, *Bursting*, 2010. Acrylic on canvas

Given which, *Bursting*, 2010, becomes symbolic of the urban claustrophobia born from the rising vehicular concentration, which scrambles to make its space through the central element which is the vein of their movement. To her this is also symbolic of the manner in which the nodes of global processes and networks are growing; such that each city has outgrown its own limits, literally bursting outwards. A vicious circle of need for making space and the consequential rise of claustrophobia and the blemished.



Figure 4-32: Prajakta Palav, *Spreading*, 2010. Acrylic & gesso on canvas

The same is also seen in some of Palav's other works speak of the not just the growing realty and infrastructural activities but also of the parallel rise of the blemished spaces – the slums. In *Spreading*, 2010, Palav comments on the parallel rise of the slums (Figure 4-32). The typical blue of the tarpaulin covers, the haphazard and stacked layers of houses, the clutter of the space broken by occasional traces of green – the trees, all rising as though a structure in itself. The top of this mound, seems like it is still in formation, getting constructed as though competing with the rising skyscrapers. Palav's comment on lived spaces and the cityscapes can be understood as the cyclical connection between the causal factors and the subsequent outcomes of measures taken to depict progress, and the very outcomes which become the causes towards further changes.



#### 4.5.5 *Locales and Locals*

Along with these activities of rising businesses in urban areas and infrastructural development, the migrant and floating population in most of the metropolises increased drastically. Over a period, this influx brought about a sense of discomfort. Now the notions of identity moved more from those of simple identification to those of the consequent decisions to be taken based on the same – of acceptance and absorption, to that of suspicion and rejection. The same not being restricted to the demarcations over the global boundaries but also within countries and regions; such that, though citizens of the same country, but of different regions, the arriving and new entities were looked upon as ‘other outsiders’ by the ‘original residents’. At this juncture, it is necessary to relook at the notion of identity both, – singularly and collectively, in the globalised world. As even as we tried to trace the Asian-ness, or Indian-ness, fissures exist even spaces within these politically defined geographies.

Talking about their present, having become centres of consumptions, nearly forces its residents to expand ones’ capabilities to be a part of or fit into the newly developed system, in comparison to the earlier conservative one. It could be said that it is a vicious circle –of needs and its fulfilments. Relentlessness becomes the character of such places. A character which can be traced in nearly every aspect of the city, and thereby it would be a futile exercise to enlist it. It is these constantly transforming aspects of various cities that have played a crucial role in defining their presence in the global scene.

Mumbai has been one such example. As also seen in the Century City project at the Tate Modern, held in London in 2001, where a section was dedicated to the metropolis under the title, *Bombay / Mumbai 1992–2001*. It covered Mumbai from the post-liberalisation era, as it formed an important space in the global arena. Having the geographic benefit for overseas trade, the colonial heritage of the business districts, an innately cosmopolitan culture and the ease of assimilation, the city has always had an edge when it came to presence and growth of economic prosperity. Having had a long-standing notion of a near dreamland, a city with ample of opportunities, dotted with

success stories of many, Mumbai and the colonial Bombay, showed even larger potential for growth in the globalised setting. Bombay or Mumbai has played and contributed to works of many artists, not necessarily local by origin, but also to those who willing and with ease became a part of its domicile. The city had a longstanding strong presence in the field of art; with art institutions, galleries, buyers and the artists, it enjoyed the privileged position as a core of art activity. Many artists from different parts of the country settled here and contributed to its art scene.



Figure 4-33: Bose Krishnamachari, *Ghost / Transmemoir*, 2008. 162 Dabbas, Found objects and construction scaffoldings, 108 LCD monitors

Bose Krishnamachari is one such artist who tried to capture the vein of the city by addressing various aspects through a body of works. Having moved to Mumbai as a student, the city to Bose was a one possessing a character of endlessness and fullness. This could be traced from the most obvious and palpable physical emblems of its large structures, to those of the intimate, personal and the daily lived experiences. Not looking at the aspects of mere grandeur and largeness, Bose addresses the notion of the very basic, yet characteristic aspects of the city. In the show titled *Ghost / Transmemoir*, (2008), he addresses the notion of trans – or of relativity (Figure 4-33; Figure 4-34). To him the city has stood for an inexhaustibly capacity towards assimilation. This could be of absorption of people from various regions, professions, religions; the newer economic patters, technological transitions and many such notions,

which over the period have contributed to its innate heterogeneity. It is this heterogeneity and the relativity which nearly makes impermanence a character of the city, the ghost then represents the looming memory of what could have been a distant past or even the very recent.



Figure 4-34: Bose Krishnamachari, *Ghost / Transmemoir*, 2008. 162 Dabbas, Found objects and construction scaffoldings, 108 LCD monitors

Subodh Gupta, as seen earlier looked at the notion of difference at global level, through that of individuals or locals of some places crossing over into new countries; their habits and culture consequently being looked upon as foreign characteristics. Bose on the other hand, looks at the very notion of disparity and its endless manifestations, not at a global or national level, but within a city. He looks at a specific category of the *dabbawalas*, the professional community tiffin delivery men, who have since decades have had a working presence in Mumbai. The batteries of men lauded for a near military precision in collection, allocation and distribution of these metal food boxes. Collecting lunch boxes from homes scattered over different localities in Mumbai and then delivering them to professional in different offices and returning them to the original residences, forms a part of their chain of work. They employ various modes of transportation, be it the buses, cycles, handcarts or the most utilised trains to accomplish their jobs. To Bose the notion of the meal which forms the core intent of the activity is emblematic of the desire of a humble human towards a good life; and the *dabbawalas*, help accomplish them.

In the work, he suspends 108 metal tiffin carries, the number drawing relevance from the *rudraksha mala*, or the rosary. Each of these tiffins having a small-scale LCD monitor; which displayed stories of various individuals, speaking about Mumbai, their life, daily strives, and many such aspects explaining the multiplicity of experiences and characters of individual life. The tiffins suspended within the chaotic mess of the wires connected to the LCDs and the headphone, added the element of frenzied, unpredictable and precarious living in such a metropolis. The suspension also had handles replicated from those in the trains, used by standing passengers. This was an attempt to replicate the pulse and the chaotic conditions under which the citizens commute daily.

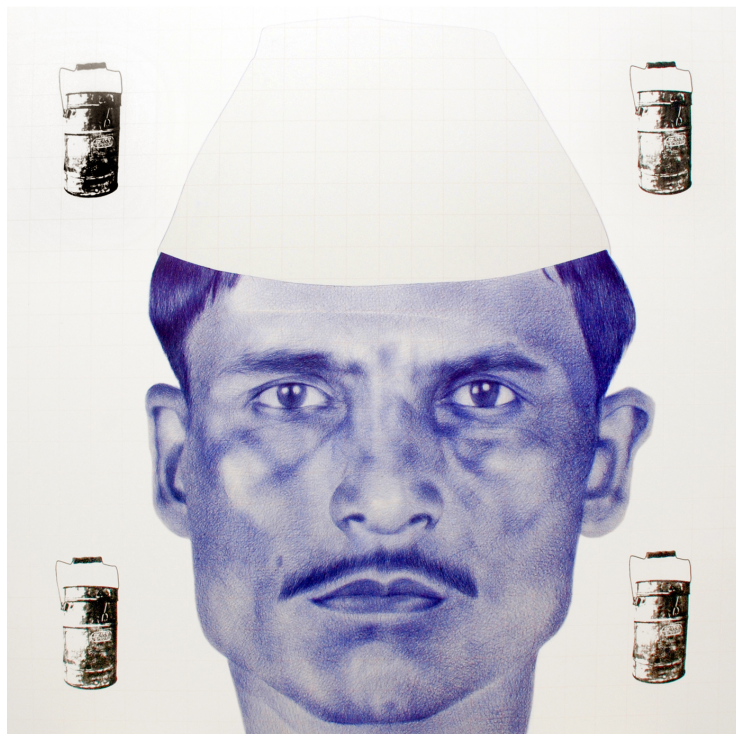


Figure 4-35: Bose Krishnamachari, *Maximum/Mumbaikar/Dabbawalla*, 2007. Ball pen and silk screen on canvas

Unlike Gupta who present the boxes as glamorous objects, Bose maintains their lacklustre crudeness, addressing the actuality of the scene. At no point does the artist try to modify the visual and create a different narrative. The juxtaposition of the *dabbas* with the LCD monitors and headsets, with the wired mesh, stands as the contrasting character of the reality. These men of humble backgrounds, travelling in inexpensive modes of public transport,

providing meals to people from varying economic strata, be it of simple jobs to those in large MNCs in glamorous structures – brings out the stark differences that coexist in the now declared megapolis. This is not a difference of mere actuality but also, according to the artist, of the difference in identity. On one hand these are men who dressed in a peculiar way – of white dresses with a *Gandhi topi*, a khadi cap, symbolic of the political involvement in the independence struggle, which was later adopted as a dress code of politicians; now adopted by these *dabbawalas* depicting their insistently local identity (Figure 4-35), to those of the rising corporates whom they cater to, who adopting a new lifestyle have marked their identity in the global scenario. Interestingly in 2001, Forbes Magazine awarded the *dabbawalas* its Six Sigma certification based on a 99.999999% delivery accuracy rate, which is approximately - 1 error for every 16 million transactions (Moore, 2011). One could say that this marked a true global attitude where the efficiencies of the most basic, simple and local were being appreciated and studied to greater benefits. It is also during this period that many Business Management schools, started inviting heads of these tiffin delivery men, to give lessons to students on operations and logistics.<sup>21</sup>

Bose further asserts this difference, not by exploring different communities, but by looking at the manner in which the citizens of Bombay / Mumbai get addressed. The renaming of Bombay to Mumbai, brought about a partial polarisation between the residents; some who were vehemently supportive and the others who were reluctant to accept the same. Given which he looks at the way of addressing the citizens – Bombaiwala, Bombayite, Mumbaiiya, Mumbaikar and Bombaiya; each of these representing the manner in which the city was once addressed, and consequently lent to that of its residents. To depict the same, he draws portraits of the locals, and places these address notes as titles; hinting at the irony of their difference in identity even as they are residents of the same city.

A similar work dealing with the identitarian logic is that of Sudhir Patwardhan's regional types, like *South Indian* 1986, *Keralite*, 1992, *Bhayya*,<sup>22</sup> 1999. Interestingly, Patwardhan's engagement with defining them deals



predominantly about their class-membership, over their actual regional features and facial type. As with the growing influx of a floating population of the toiling class, the artist explores their presence as near aliens, by giving the works titles based on their places of belonging. What seems evidently identifiable is their working type and the living space which is presented accordingly. In *Bhayya*, an elderly man takes the centre-stage. A piece of cloth hung across, seems to create a private space for him; where seems to have arrived after a bath and is about to get ready. With clothes lying on the floor and his posture, hint at the same. This image of this man, fails to provide any specific typicality, in terms of his regional roots; though his surroundings, and the current action which he undertakes gives a certain hint at his employment or financial class. With this, he withdraws from passing any comments of division or segregation, but provides a picture of cohesiveness, in terms of human financial needs and existence. The title like *Bhayya*, could have easily been replaced by any other Indian regional type, and yet would have held relevance.



Figure 4-36: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Bhayya*, 1999.

## 4.6 Global Capitalism / Consumerism – Core of the Global Networks

### 4.6.1 Personal in the Global Economy

Koumudi Patil explores the notion of the individuals and the influence of the global economy on them. She traces the manner in which individuals get engulfed by the growing aspects of commoditisation and consumerism, two factors which have been the core characters of global economy. This is understood through the projected notion of ‘personal care’, which were meant to cater to the needs of an individual. This perspective is an outcome of her long-standing concern with the notion of human skin and its varied connotations. In *Wrap Your Skin*, 2009, the skin is portrayed as the first point of contact and a terrain of identity formation. Keeping the same as the base, she tries to project as to what could be considered as a ‘global type’ or ‘universal skin’, in a contemporary globalised world having claims of equality and an unbiased character.

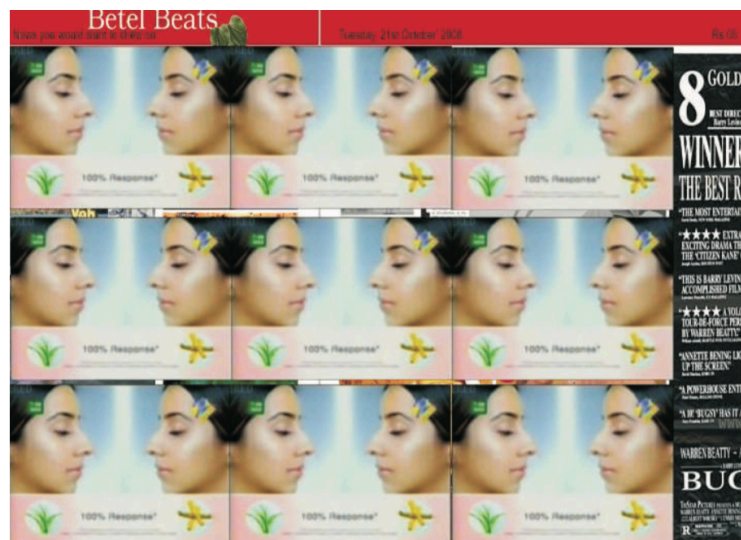


Figure 4-37: Koumudi Patil, *No Marks*, 2009. Video stills

The skin is projected as an important organ of identity formation and of an option to garner financial benefits. Keeping the Indian economy and the forces of industry specific global businesses, Patil through her work *No Marks*, 2009, analyses the various aspects which contributed to the notions of personal

projection at a global level, in terms of a personality, especially with respect to the skin and its appeal (Figure 4-37). The importance of this organ according to her has been escalated so high that an entire industry is based on it. The influence of which has been increasing as borders are opening towards businesses from different lands.

At this juncture, one could consider the time period of the 1990s when India won Miss Universe and Miss World titles. This was the time, as seen earlier, when the Indian economy had successfully adopted policies of liberalisation. Events like the mentioned beauty pageants were sponsored by large international and domestic brands. The success in such international events was portrayed by the media as an attestation of the entry of India in the global scenario. The facts that Indian beauties were now accepted as global exemplars, was to have parallel effect of indirectly qualifying the local female population towards similar acceptance. A consequence of which was the entry of international brands in the Indian markets. Products catering to the specific needs of Indian skin type were being launched; such that the notion of acceptance were dealt with the superficial criterions like a universal looking individual (Singh, 2017). The skin no longer remained a part of the personal front, but became the ground on which the ‘parity products’ were defined, designed and commoditised. These were attempts to prove that by adding the cosmetic skin, one would gain what could be considered as the ‘universal skin’ (personal communication, January 14, 2018).

In *No Marks*, the artist draws references from various popular sources. Movie clips and advertisements focusing on the notions of ‘ideal beauty’ are projected in the one channel video. The advertisements, as is their purpose, projects the need of flawlessness of the skin as truth, which evidently is a hypothetical concept. These causes were moulded to cater to the insecurities of local Indians, being about the darker skin, marital acceptance and rejection, or general rejections based on the lack of the ideal, flawless beauty type. At the same time, the edge of the screen shows a cut-out from some magazine, mentioning something about winners. Patil tries to highlight the attitude of persistent bombarding of news, thoughts or beliefs, at times false notions by the



media, such that eventually the viewers become numb to the difference and accept it as truth, by projecting the same image through multiple windows on the same screen. One is reminded of Baudrillard and the notion of simulacra and repetition; such that the image and the repetition of the same, becomes a part of a make-believe system and eventually succeeds. This brings us back to the revolution of the ICT and the liberalisation of the Indian economy. The 1990s was also the time when the Indian television sets, witnessed the entry of large number international private channels, telecasting serials, news, entertainment programs, and advertisements from different countries. Unlike the earlier, government controlled, Doordarshan Channel, which provided a restricted scope for such projections from international branded players, the satellite telecast had now made it easy to bypass this hurdle. Thereby providing a wider scope for various international businesses and brands to influence the viewers directly.<sup>23</sup>

Given the same, *No Marks*, stands as an example of the way in which the personal – based on the skin, entered the public realm, not for its inherent character, but for a projection of the ideal type to be achieved, further backed with the primary and sole intentions of garnering financial benefits. Therefore, commoditising not just product but also the emotions and the insecurities. To the artist, it is this aspect of globalisation which has largely contributed towards the building fictitious norms of acceptance and rejections, in the global arena.

#### 4.6.2 *Money, Fetishism and Fears*

The possession of money, wealth or property, plays in various ways on the human psyche. In some cases of power, security and strength, and the other extreme of the insecurity of managing it and the fear of its absence. In a growing consumerist society, where the notions and tendencies of humans to cater to one's desires and fetishes are constantly titillated by the market forces, these strengths and fears are constantly tested. The character of global transnational businesses or of the individuals towards profit garnering, creates a constantly escalating upper-limits of the material desires and consequent deficits to fulfil them. This is like a vicious cycle, where the increase in income, leads to an

increase in desires, and the constant rise of which again forces one to increase the income. When considering this attitude, it is evident that it has not been an outcome of the recent changes due to globalisation, but has manifested through different forms over the time, as being fed by varying reasons.

L. N. Tallur in his works read the notion of *chromatophobia*,<sup>24</sup> defined - or the fear for managing money, through a contemporary perspective, as he makes use of historic objects and motifs. The artist's note that Tallur provides seems more like clinical analysis; beginning from understanding the medical condition, to its diagnosis, prognosis and a possible treatment. He also supplants this with an *e-folk tale: A Solution to the Global Economic Crisis*, a story of how a troubled town becomes debt free, through the circulation of a single currency note, in a chain of events.<sup>25</sup> At one point, he seems to be a proponent of the belief that constant money circulation can lead to the betterment of the masses. Further, with this Tallur builds the concept as though spreading over a temporal setting. The notion of a folk tale, suggests that the story must have set a long-standing in the folk tradition; at the same time titling it as an 'e-folk tale' he brings in close to contemporaneity, with the technological backing of the virtually connected world, as a near and new interpretation of the same, now with respect to the current consumerist society.



Figure 4-38: L. N. Tallur, *Chromatophobia*, 2010. Wood, bronze and nailed coins

A look at the works in this series, bring in a sense of incongruence, as the title and the work exhibit a different character. The title draws from a near medical understanding, whereas the work seems to be derived from the Indian

classical sculptural traditions. The sculpture, two bronze sculptures, of females, with the supple body, evidently of the Chola period, stand facing each other (Figure 4-38). A huge log of wood separates them, as it passes in between their faces, which are the supporting elements of the log. Through their faces runs the supporting lever. A closer look at the huge log, reveals the presence of coins, as though hammered into it. Reminding one of the age-old tradition, of doing the same as a part of a wish fulfilling superstition; especially related to those of financial security. The sheer material richness and the ambiguity of the work creates a sense of apparition. The work seems to be visually closed, as the sculptures don't face the viewers, but invariably call them to take a closer look. To counter this sense of an isolated and independent presence is a gallery, Tallur strikes a sense of involvement from the viewers, as he invites them to touch, feel and 'work' on the work. He does this keeping in mind the wish fulfilling ritual and states.

Tallur's instructions for the viewers, which accompany the works, are a constant reminder of the society in which the notion of financial security and the abundance of the same have always been the reasons of concern for individuals. The contemporary time finds a different version of it. The consumerist society invariably builds a need / greed towards material possessions, and the sheer fear of the failure of fulfilling it, sets in the chromatophobia. Of our concern is the manner in which Tallur, builds a sense of interaction and involvement of the viewers. Usually most of the sculptures are prohibited from touching, but Tallur, reverses this position, as though calling people to give a way to their fears, 'with a pure mind'

Another work which adheres to a similar concept is that of *Unicode*, 2011. A similarly interesting incongruence of the title and the material, strikes in this work too. A classical bronze image, is encased in a rough mass of concrete, which resembles a meteor. The only way to identify the original sculpture is through its encircling ring, which is the ring of fire / flames, and the *apasmara purusha*, placed at its base. Evidently it is the image of Nataraja. The concrete in the centre has coins embedded within it. The material grandness of the work stands out, as the sheen and the symmetrically designed ring of the

bronze, contrasts the plainness of the rough concrete, the roughness of which is broken intermittently with the glistening of the coins. A first look at the work makes one wonder, whether the image has been removed or replaced. The artist, as is his wont, builds on the brilliant visual, from its historic, ritualistic purpose, as he tries to explain the transformation in the very notion and understanding of a god. As a very simple understanding it could be said, that the deity of Nataraja has been replaced by a modern-day icon of propitiation / desire – the concrete and the coins; symbolic of urbanisation, and the financially ambitious tendencies.



*Figure 4-39: L. N. Tallur, Unicode, 2011. Bronze, coins and concrete*

As we understand the concept of Tallur' works, it is also necessary to understand in involvement with the material and the aspects of presentation. His engagement with the material explorations could be an outcome of his studying of the traditional mediums. The ease with which he assembles, manipulates and appropriates the media, be it as a direct borrowing, as in the case of the bronzes, or of the appropriations, where these traditional or classical works lose their original specificities to befit, what could be called a global idiom. The same is explained by Peter Nagy,

Mr. Tallur manipulates found figurative forms from the diverse categories available on the Indian subcontinent: classical bronzes from the medieval Chola and Vijayanagara empires, rigid Tirthankaras of the Jain religion, monolithic meditative Buddhas, carved wooden animist examples from tribal cultures, and the kitsch reproductions made for the nouveau riche urban market...he has been particularly courageous to use religious iconography in his work while most of his peers within India shy away from such subject matter (the primary reason being that a plethora of ghastly, religious kitsch “contemporary art” can be found in abundance). Yet Mr. Tallur’s transmogrifications of his found figures hit just the right note, allowing the original source to still be discerned while disguising them enough so that they become more globalized and less Indian (The Acumenical Pursuits of Mr. L.N. Tallur, 2010).

The insistence on the indigenous material, to express the contemporary – both in terms of the concept and in terms of a visual experience, according to Nagy is a stance of making ‘anti-digital’ works; such that the material aesthetics of the past dominates. This is further enhanced by the manner in which he presents them; such that the original connotations and its contemporary translations both coexist simultaneously. This could be an outcome of his training in museology. In these works, Tallur plays with the notion of ‘an experience’ – either as an actuality or as a simulacrum, which dominates the postmodern world. Calling the viewers to participate, in the case of *Chromatophobia*, to hammer in the coins, and wish with a clear mind. This in a way forced the viewers to enact the ritual which by now seems to be relegated as a superstition, and at the same time, to rethink about the notion of money and the fears around, it in a world where the emblems of consumerism are rising at an exponential rate.

#### 4.6.3 Divergent Stories

The stories of economic liberalisation, globalization and the rising notions of progress were projected to find manifestations in different fields of functioning and through various forms. Some of these stories lauded India's entry and to be lasting presence in the global arena, and the others of domestic achievements. Domestically, various sectors in India boasted of the booming growth in an extremely short span, based on the policies which lured global investors towards India. Undoubtedly there were outstanding growths witnessed in some sectors based on the needs for providing support to global businesses which has shown interest to enter India. One such sector, as discussed earlier was of Information and Communication. One could say that apart from the urban infrastructural growth, through betterment of roadways, flyovers, metro-rail projects, the ICT was to an inevitable part of the national development / upgradation project. With a decent infrastructural base and the help of the private players, the government was able to provide the same. In the late 1990s a cellular phone, a portable possession, was available only to the elite. It was an object beyond the financial reach of the common people. Over a few years, with increasing competition from international brands, and the subsequent lowering of licence fee by the government for local players led to a drastic drop in the prices of the mobile connection service rates and also in the prices of the handset.<sup>26</sup> This was considered as a victorious moment for the government, when schemes were launched to connect any part of the country with a call costing Re. 1 per minute.

Jitish Kallat a Mumbai based artist, looked at this achievement as a news stated in the press. The headlines in the newspaper stated, *Call anywhere in India for one rupee!* A glorious moment, depicting progress, technological proficiency towards making the life of the citizens easy based on the connectivity and the closeness it was to bring. But as one sifted through the pages of the newspaper stories of poverty and heartrending incidences surfaced. To show the grandness of the Re. 1 project, Kallat in his work titled *Death of Distance*, 2007, made a large sculpture depicting the coin, made from fibreglass, and coated with black lead (Figure 4-40). The near life-size, 161 centimetres in

diameter sculpture, was symbolic of the way in which it was projected by the media. One could move around this central work, as it stood stable in the exhibition gallery. This was collectively displayed with a set of five lenticular prints. Each print depicting two opposing stories picked up by the artist, based on the value of a Re. 1, as stated in a newspaper on a given day.



*Figure 4-40: Jitish Kallat, Death of Distance, 2007. Black lead on fibreglass, a rupee coin and five lenticular prints*

The one on the cover page of the newspaper, as mentioned earlier, glorified the advancement of the telecommunication sector such that people could reach out to anyone, anywhere within a country in just a rupee, and one of the opposing story in the hind pages stated that a girl committed suicide as her mother was unable to provide her Re. 1 for food (Figure 4-41). Another story stated the content from the United Nations report in 2005, according to which many children in India were still malnourished. These stories according to Kallat expose the hollowness of the projected image of the booming economic markets, and progress, as there are large disparities in income distribution, and unequal benefit reaping of progress. The choice of depicting these opposing stories through the lenticular prints evidently seems intentional. He plays with the notions of projection of the popular and superficial glories, when the actualities and the ground realities were far from benefiting from these acts of progress. One is reminded of Arjun Appadurai, as he speaks of the existence of heterogeneity. Though his deduction is based on the multicultural



aspect, the *financescapes*, discussed by him in *Grassroots Globalisation*, provide a cue to interpret the same in terms of economic disparities; in terms of those benefiting and those distant from the influence of the global forces, playing a role in the betterment of the financial benefits, presumably for the citizens of the country.

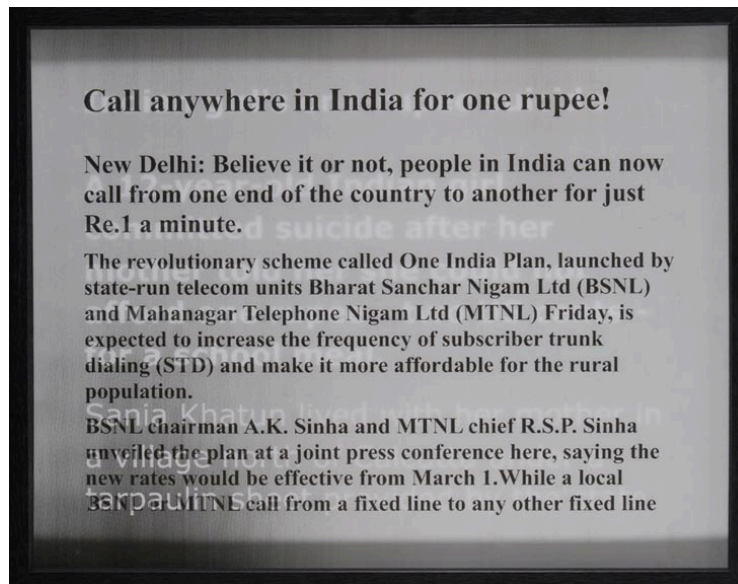


Figure 4-41: Jitish Kallat, *Death of Distance*, 2007. Black lead on fibreglass, a rupee coin and five lenticular prints

The title *Death of Distance*, can be read in two ways, one as the obvious diminishing gap in communication, between individuals separated by geographic spaces. The other of raising a question about the validity of the global progress project implemented domestically; and further analysing if it has practically diminished any gap between the economic strata, or have the economic disparities increased. Kallat's engagement with these notions of disparities and differences can be traced in some of his earlier works too, where he addresses the state of the young children, especially the homeless urchins. Being a resident of Mumbai, Kallat depicts the life of these hapless children who struggle for basic survival by doing odd jobs. Though these children are engaged in various professions, he focuses on the ironic situation, where these illiterate children, sell books at major junctions of commutation. Be it in the trains, at the traffic signals, or on the roads, they engage and try to allure the potential buyers by listing the unique value of each book they carry. Most of

the times, more than the value of the book, it is due to pity towards these children and their energetic enthusiasm that the people buy books from them. Their persistence in selling these books is born out of their need for basic sustenance. The artist tries to reverse the ironies of the notion of progress associated with metropolises, the economic disparities, the fate of innumerable homeless children.



Figure 4-42: Jitish Kallat, *Eruda*, 2006. Black lead on fibreglass

A work titled, *Eruda*, 2006, depicts the same (Figure 4-42). It is an iconic sculpture of a boy selling books in frayed clothes. According to the artist the urchins selling books on the streets in Mumbai is a common sight and not so shocking visual. To Kallat these are the survivors of the city in the economically strong world. The large fibreglass work is covered with black lead. The choice of material was intentional, calling for the viewers to touch it, such that the graphite would leave marks one's fingers. This according to Kallat marked a transactional existence of these homeless children with the people around them. Further by executing these works at a grand scale he transformed the presence of these urchins from images of repulsion to that of a heroic status. The feet of the boy are in the shape of a house. Though this seems literal, but the intension of stating that for these children without homes, any place they

wish to halt or stay on the streets, becomes a temporary home for them. Thereby hinting at the undiminishing presence of the economically marginalised lot of an urban society.



Figure 4-43: Jitish Kallat, *Annexe*, 2006. Black lead, fibreglass, stainless steel base

Like *Eruda*, another work by Kallat addressing the life of marginalised children, is *Annexe*, 2006 (Figure 4-43). It addresses even more pressing circumstances in which these children survive. The child is presented in an upright posture, with a near glistening body, with his feet too converted into homes. This boy carries a thick rope on his left shoulder, one used to whip lash himself as a part of a brave act, which shall presumably entertain the public, mentally forcing or convincing them to give the boy some money. The drain on the pedestal could be symbolic of the drained existence of these children or could also depict the societal gulf between the wealthy and the ones scrambling for sustenance (Saatchi Gallery, 2018). The projection of such disparities has been one of the important aspects critiquing globalisation. Further the same is palpable dominantly in places and spaces which are either the nodes or parts of the nodal networks on which the globalised world functions. The metro and the megapolises being the evident sites.

The notion of divide and a fissured society which is usually read on the basis of economic, caste, racial disparities, such that these have an evident and large impact. These are generalised understanding of the segregations. Rakhi Peswani, as a practicing artist, using the divide between the ‘art and craft’, reads the life of anonymity and marginalisation of craftsmen. It is known that mechanisation, industrial progress, and large-scale mass manufacturing has to a large extent led to the rapid fall of the handmade industry and thereby the falling number of craftsmen. The industry based on the physical skill of the humans, coupled with proficiency gained over the years of toil, makes the product emblematic of the process and the labour which leads to its creation. The skill usually passed down over generations, could be looked upon as wealth passed through heirlooms.



Figure 4-44: Rakhi Peswani, *Shelter (for the Itinerant)*, 2013. Jute, Iron nails, wool, hand darned organza fabric, dimensions: variable

The marginalisation of the craftsmen is also looked, based on their skill being outsourced by many artists. They now form the part of the labour, a lower effort, over the conceptual superiority of the artist. Now the notion of authorship takes a dominant position over the ‘unintellectual’ skill of the toiling counterpart. She recreates the living conditions of these craftsmen in an ironic way. In *Shelter (for the Itinerant)*, 2013, an attractive looking fabric is suspended to look like a cover over a sleeping space (Figure 4-44). The sheen

and the decoration on the fabric creates an illusion of an attractive space; but a closer look reveals the inexpensive organza fabric. It could be understood as bringing together of the craftsmen's skill of creating beautiful works and yet the actuality of their life depicts a more than simple, rather frugal life.

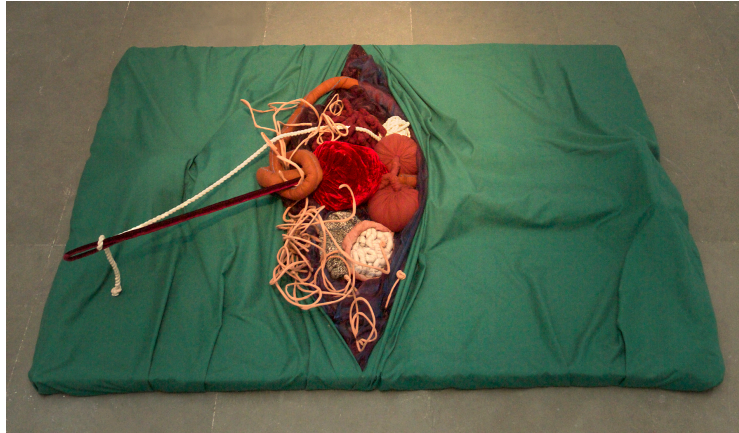


Figure 4-45: Rakhi Peswani, *Shelter (for the Craftsman)*, 2012. Mixed media with various fibers and fabrics, wooden frame, iron rod.

The show exhibiting these works was titled *Anatomy of Silence*. Another work carrying the similar titled *Shelter (for the Craftsman)*, 2012, depicted a bed from a green cloth (Figure 4-45). The colour drawing immediate reference to a hospital setup. The bed was slit in the centre, giving a view of the internal organs, the intestinal and renal parts all oozing out of the space. These organs were made from various fabrics, ranging from glossy velvet to cotton, ropes and thick threads. Placed in a partitioned space, at the very first glance, this work immediately struck a grotesque note. The Craftsman's Body, represented the visceral aspect of the body, and confrontational with respect to the location in the exhibiting space. The internal organs were made from the tools and materials used in the process of sewing. The absence of the body could be read as a non-specific case, but a generalised understanding of the condition of such skilled individuals, "representing the body was not as an object but as an entity that shapes and gets shaped by a process of craftsmanship." The presence of the needle attesting the act of making, or assuring that it is the body of a craftsman, even as not body is actually depicted. Given the same, the work could be understood at the demise as an eventuality of the industry where the proficiency of the hand still is of importance, or could also state the anonymity with which

these individuals dissolve, leaving no mark, as in the contemporary times the rising importance of the conceptual and the consequent authorship dominate the labour, skill and the physical.

#### 4.6.4 *Between the Emotional and the Spectacle*

Sudarshan Shetty like Jitish Kallat tries to capture the impact of the economic changes in a globalised world, but unlike Kallat who looks at individuals and specific situations Shetty tries to explore the impact of a consumerist society on human emotions. As has been the way for Shetty he looks at the element of incongruence and a playful irony in depicting these issues. The rising projections of stabilising and booming Indian economy, the international experience now present and a possibility to experience in one's own country through the availability of international products in the newly constructed 'malls', again emblematic of the western shopping spaces, the glamorous structures, backed with the capacity to lure and overpower anyone who entered it with a sense of awe that – 'we are there' in the international pedestal. This was also the time when the Indian art market was opening up and started displaying financial and functional professionalism which earlier displayed a conservative tone and a more personalised approach. This field too was stuck by the need for a 'spectacle creation', which was seen through the growing number of exhibition opening parties. Well this by no means hinted at a diluting of the art practice, but there was an insistent need for creating a large impact, be it through the occasion itself, or media coverage or the presence of the elite and celebrities; as discussed in the third chapter.

Sudarshan's attempt in understanding the impact of the rising consumerist tendency moves beyond the simple notions of transactional tendencies of buying and the increasing desire for the same. He tries to interpret the same in terms of human emotions; the strongest one being that of love. In his show titled *Love*, 2006, Shetty conjures nearly incongruent elements to build an associative logic justifying their assemblage. In his series of works on *Love* he explores its various preconceived notions and their mutability. A Braille typewriter ceaselessly types 'Love is blind'; these lines cannot be 'read', as they



need to be felt. The machine types this in an automated mechanical manner, with no presence of a human to do the manual task. With this he raises a question – if love is blind, then what would it mean to an unsighted one? The text being typed on the Braille, adds the ironic tone, questioning our notions of sight and perceptions; in a way reversing the status of the sighted, saying, that love in the world of the blind is retinal (Figure 4-46). Such that the possibility of sight exists, the retinal takes prominence and the emotional and rational are overpowered.



Figure 4-46: Sudarshan Shetty, *No title (from Love)*, 2006. Paper, brailleur, wooden table, mechanical device

Moving ahead from the visual quotient, the artist takes into consideration a material aspect of love. Trying to read its significance in a consumerist society, he analyses the objects one tent to ‘transact’ with as symbols of love.<sup>27</sup> These could range from cards, soft toys, balloons, flowers, etcetera. Shetty, looks at one prominent symbol, which was of the heart. He feels that - a heart, a symbol of love, has undergone transition from a serious, sensitive and highly personal sentiment to a marketable, sellable commodity. It has now become an object of mass production. The same can be symbolised through inexpensive heart-shaped balloons, which are sold not just in shops who can state the significance as a part of the brand making entities, but also by homeless children selling them on the roads, traffic lights and outside educational institutions, where the teenage crowd gets easily lured by buying



these inexpensive options and thereby being participants of the enjoyment. Shetty looks at those heart shaped balloons, with the word *Love* printed on them. This act to the artist is a sheer act of reduction of the human emotions to an inexpensive transaction-able commodity. By no means does he intend to stress on the quotient of emotions and the financial value of the object, but he stresses on the necessity created by the market players, to participate through such commodity transfer to express one's love.

Apart from the notions of event creations at the general level, the artist looks at the field of art. The booming economic market, which had cascading effect on the art market, changed the scene drastically. We shall not discuss this again, as we have in the third chapter. The character of spectacle creation of the globalised world, found a translation in the art field, through the opening parties of exhibitions. The glamour and glitter, and a need for grandeur, at the openings, was met with opposing reactions. To some it was a way to get people from different fields together to draw and interest or at least to see works of art, whereas to some it was a way of proclaiming that no longer would artists be considered as the penniless entities, but could find stardom. On the other hand, it was looked upon as a hollow event in which individuals came together not with the intension of viewing works, but of being a part of the grand event, it by no means contributed to the exhibition or its viewership, but was just a promotional stunt. The intention is not to get judgemental about the scenario but of presenting the polar views that have been coexisting. The need to do so, is because Sudarshan Shetty, used the same polarity in his work titled *Party Is Elsewhere*. This work, vehemently ridiculed the glamorous party culture at gallery openings, which took an upsurge after the economic boom in the late 90's. In this work 365 wine glasses were placed on a large table, which was placed near the walls of the exhibiting space. Two large hammers were fixed to the walls, and repeatedly, in a mechanical motion they hit the wine glasses. The rude and loud noise of the banging hammer and the crushing of glasses created a sense of unease during the 'opening party' for the show.

In a way, the work had a site-specific connotation, that it was placed in an art gallery and exhibition space for works of art, which would expect the

presence of observant individuals with an inclination towards looking and reading works of art. This as was not a space in which a party was to be hosted, especially one serving alcohol, as it would blur away one's vision, precisely the requirement for appreciating the displayed works of art – therefore stating that the 'party is elsewhere' this is an exhibiting space. Along with the site-specificity the work also had a temporal-specificity, such that it held specific relevance when the opening parties were hosted, and it suggested the irony. Interestingly, as the work functionally crashed the glasses, no viewers were willing to go near the work, both, because of the deafening noise of the hammering and also fearing of getting hurt by the shattered glass. Therefore, it could be said that in a way the work successfully achieved the sense of repulsion it wanted to create.<sup>28</sup>

Though not of direct relevance but to mention of a parallel expression, can be seen in the work of Wang Jin, a Chinese artist. The artist too addressed the growing consumerist attitude of the people through his work, titled *Ice: Central China*, 1996. This work consisted of a huge ice wall in which the consumer or commercial goods were embedded, nearly frozen inside a thick wall of ice. This work was done near a mall, an emblem of the consumerist society. These goods were visible to the people, walking nearby, or those who were to go into the mall to these very same items. In this way, the artist tried to recreate the mall space. The only difference being, that in the mall one would have to pay for these products, but here they were there for free. The ice, was then a physical barrier to be broken. On understanding that the works were just places, even though in reality they were 'exhibited', people actually broke the ice slab, and took the goods that were placed within in. like Shetty, this work too had a sense of site specificity, and the artists highlighted the strong desire of the people for material possession, which overpowered their understanding that this could have been an object of art (Hung, 2001, pp. 114-130).

#### **4.7 New Technologies: Expansion of Sensorial Experience**

The revolution of the Information and Communication Technology which to a large extent contributed to the success of the global project, on attaining the same, started getting a status of ubiquity. In the current times, barely any field has remained untouched by this technological advancement. It built the grounds for acceptance of different media, in the minds of the technologically savvy individuals. The multifaceted nature of the ‘soft media’ was strongly gripping the Indian markets in the 1990s; not only with reference to the art field, but as a general understanding. Many businesses were willingly moving to the computer and internet systems for running their processes and for storing their data. This marked their tendency as a progressive and futuristic entities, over the conventional ones, characterised by time-consuming manual processes, with high possibility of errors. Here we are not trying to be judgemental about the two ways of working, but this is to highlight the changing notions of working and the willingness to accept the new methods, and attempts of becoming a part of the global functional systems. It is necessary to understand that many of these transitions were backed with the logic and desire of becoming equal to their global counterparts. Within a span of a decade, that is of the 1990s, the number of houses with Personal Computers had also risen drastically. Giving an idea that the digital age was not at the doorstep, but had made its way into our daily activities, and we were already building a dependency on it.

This in a way made the common man use-to the repeated reference of the digital, be it in terms of functional methods or in terms of popular, or what is called as consumer-grade technology like – pagers, personal computers, cellular phones, internet services, wireless communication and multiple ways in which the growing acquaintance with these, made their presence very casual. In a way one could say, that this technology was internalised in ones’ lifestyle. At times, a lack of which has been looked upon as an awkward and outdated attitude. Over the years, this internalisation of the new information and communication technology - has shifted from that of strict utility and aiding of functional working, to that of addiction. The latter seen, in the way individuals

experience the compulsive desire to be on social media, such that it becomes a terrain for identity formation; further the practice of internet surfing, and gaming have also been of crucial importance.

Taking cognisance of widespread use of the same, ranging from a rational one, to that of a compulsive and addictive one, many museums and art centres have started granting works based on this technology a specific place. These works range from those of innovative learning processes for children, with a focus on art, to those dealing with the notions of experiential phenomena as a part of a formal art practice. For example, granting of game based artworks a different place in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, had raise debates over the same, in 2012. Similarly, Tate, London, set ties to procure art works based on video games (Halloran, 2015). Given which, the notion of merging of the digital media with works of art, have given rise to a specific field of study, which looks at these works of art as a product of a technology which symbolises the current time, and of the concepts which the various artist employ. Further we shall also see, how the works made by Indian artists, based on the new technologies, contributed to the expansion of the scope of a viewer; moving from that of viewing works, to that of being a part of it and experiencing them.

#### *4.7.1 Digitextuality and the Viewer / Participant*

The notion of a viewer has been of crucial importance with respect to any form of art. As an individual who carefully looks and inspects the work, the one who makes attempts to read it, either in its entirety or even through a brisk glance. Nevertheless, the visual presence, a reactionary process, a near necessity, builds up a sense of inevitability rather inseparability between the two entities, that is - the work of art and the viewer. As is always said in terms of performing arts, that a performance becomes a performance, only through the presence of a viewer, as an evident difference between any dress rehearsal and the final performance. This extends the limits of the completion of the work from the side of the artist to that of the receptor, thereby moving from the notion of the completion of the work to that of its finality, as the one of non-culmination but of continuum.

The ICT and the parallel and supplanting technological revolution has affected this concept of a viewer and viewership in various ways. These can be traced in various spheres – be it in the manner of making works of art, the spatial logic of its presence, conceptual engagements, along with many such issues, the core is – the one of questioning the very notion of - what all can be considered as art? This has been of superseding importance. With the increasing number of media finding qualification for making works of art, and with the merging and interactive osmosis between various disciplines, an art work seems to have become an extremely fluid entity. Evidently, an outcrop of the all-encompassing postmodernist tendency. The cascading effect of the same fluidity or ambiguity can be traced while defining the receptor of the work, that is, the viewer.

Commonly known as an entity linked to the work of art by an optical engagement, the definition of a viewer revolves around restrictive sensory responses towards works, done in conventional medium. Here there is no intension to discuss the opposition between retinal verses cerebral art. Influenced by various happenings, both within the field of art, and the exterior, one can trace an incessant need for bold expressions, leading to the alteration of the manner of exhibiting works, conceptualizing them and most importantly of now ‘engaging’ the viewers.<sup>29</sup> Since our focus is on how globalisation has been crucial to bring about this transformation, we shall consider the relevant form of technology which was associated with it. Evidently the ICT and the digital revolution were collectively responsible. Therefore, we shall focus on the same.<sup>30</sup>

Before we venture in understanding the concept of digitextuality, it is interesting to see Brecht and Heidegger’s analysis, stating that forms of technological progress, rarely remain restricted in the realm of ‘being used’, for which they were originally intended to. In the long run, they are always inculcated, ‘incorporated’ and ‘lived’ with. The digital technology has certainly attained this status in no time. In the current section, we would be dealing with this acceptance of technology in the works of art, not just as a direct borrowing, but by analysing its impact on the way it involves the viewer, who is no longer

restricted to the category of viewing, but experiences an expansion of sensorial engagement.

We shall begin with the understanding of the process, as a part of making of the works, and move towards the way it is received. In the making and reading of the conventional works of art like – paintings, prints, sculptures, etcetera, the material used, the background of the artist, varied influences, and the respective concepts, are taken into consideration; coupled with the background and the understanding of the viewer, a similar logic of meaning making and its reception can be used with respect to digital art. Anna Everett, analysis the concept of *digitextuality*, which evidently deals with the digital medium, and its reading based on the sign and signifying systems which contributes to the formation and transference of meaning. She elaborates in the following way,

Digitextuality, then, is a neologism that at its most basic combines two familiar word images: the overdetermined signifier *digital*, which denotes most of computer-driven medias' technological processes and products, and Juila Kristeva's term *intertextuality*... With the two terms conjoined in this way digitextuality suggests a more precise or utilitarian trope capable at ones of describing and constructing a sense-making function for digital technology's newer interactive protocols, aesthetic features, transmedia interphases and end user subject positions, in the context of traditional media antecedence. Moreover, digitextuality is intended to address with some degree of specificity, those marked continuities, existing between traditional ("old") media and their digital ("new") media progeny and, especially how new media use gets constructed (Digitextuality and Click Theory Theses on Convergence Media in the Digital Age, 2003, pp. 5-6).

Like in the case of the study of texts, the signifying system, and its field of transposition, play an important role in the process of meaning making. Since

the signifying system itself is loaded with multiplicity, given which the reception, as in the case of art itself is bound to be plural, diverse and never is it complete. In terms of digitextuality, even as Everett draws the similarities, she also states its departure from the concept of intertextuality as follows. It is of a development of a “new signifying system” which is loaded with diverse visual and sensory relevance and references, such that the transposition leads to a ‘metasignifying system of discursive absorption, whereby different signifying systems and materials are translated and often transformed into zeros and ones for infinite recombinant signifiers. (2003, p. 7).’

The same can be explained by understanding the logic in which the digital media functions. One, based on the digital codes built from the combinations of zero and one; and the other of the very image, visible and understandable to all, which itself is backed by a visual repository, which over the advent of the digital age and the communication facilitation, are constantly bombarded on the masses. At one point, we understand the concept of textuality in a conventional manner, and try to translate it in the new signifying system, which is backed by different functions, especially with respect to its viewers.



Figure 4-47: Baiju Parthan, *Mill Junction 1 (Soft Graffiti)*, 2009. Oil, acrylic on canvas

Before we venture in the explanation of the same, we shall see how Baiju Parthan uses, the mentioned technical codes which lead to the creation of the image in his works. In *Mill Junction*, the image seems to converge symmetrically in the centre (Figure 4-47). The picture seems to hold two incongruent parts together, one of the sky and the other of the land. The deep colour of the sky, with the highlighting of the clouds in a ghostly manner and



the presence of some flying war-like machines, with a fractional presence of birds, creates an impression of a picture culled out from a science-fiction movie. Whereas the land, seems like a more of the regular, mundane city-life with the traffic and pedestrians. A person with its back to the viewer, possibly engaged in a telephonic conversation, takes an important space. Even as this work would have looked convincingly real, the artist to insist the invasiveness of the digital media with the colour and most importantly by addition of the fragments of the codes that create the image. With the current reference, he superimposes the image with its digital clone, the very code itself to assert, the inevitable presence and the internalisation of this new media in our daily life.

The title of the work suggests a more mechanical aspect of the industrial modernity of most of the cities, the superimposition of the same by the digital code, is a metaphor for the new connotation of technological progress. Given which the process of meaning making is not restricted to that of the visual itself but also to the technical aspects, which contribute to the creation of the same. At the same time, the artist does not take a digital print of the work, but has painted it in oils. This could be considered as an attempt to mark the continuity between the conventional media and the acquiring of the new.

Along with the concept of meaning making, the digital arts provide a larger scope of a sensorial experience. The restriction of works to the retinal level now expand into that of sound and touch. As discussed earlier, terms like 'click of a mouse' and 'pointing and selecting', give a 'sense of control' to the user / viewer. Along with the same, the notions of temporality too contribute to the process of meaning making. The works like videos, or sound tracks, are presented to the viewer / listener in a strict linear way. This could be compared to reading of a book, but in this case a stipulated time is predetermined. There is also a possibility for simultaneity, such that the same work could be run in various venues at the same time. At the same time, the works are loaded with another added responsibility of engaging the viewer; such that providing an adequate and appropriate experience too is of utmost importance. The quotient of aesthetics with respect to the digital media, focuses on the aspects of colour schemes, movements of the images, definition or the picture quality, the sound

and its correspondence with the image, etcetera. These factors add to the way in which the viewer increasingly engages with the work. Given the same digitextuality, plays a role beginning from the conventional media, or what is considered as 'old' media, of the visual type, and moving towards the expanding sensorial experience, coupled with the new manners and methods of meaning making, which are inherent to the technology and its interactive and inclusive presentation, such that the viewer now becomes a part of the work, and thereby experiences it, over that of seeing it.

The easy access to various new forms of digital media have in a way given individuals from different backgrounds to make works, which over a period have got recognised as works of art. At one level, it is considered as a tool for democratic participation. Again, one is reminded of the aims of globalisation of equal scope for participation. And further also provides ways of presenting it, without a necessity of a formal presentation space, like an art gallery. Though this has not been the case for all the artists, but various artists have moved from the clutches of the white cube and black box, to post their works on the internet, calling for the viewers interaction, leading to its completion. Here, it could be said that the use of digital media for making works of art, the range and structure of interconnectivities and networks, have to a large extent empowered the individual to present the works, beyond conventional spaces. Further these expand the reactionary involvements of the viewer, to attain multisensorial purpose.

#### *4.7.2 Newer Mediums and Early Expressions*

The works based on digital art or what has been categorised as New Media art, did find a beginning in the 1990s, but was still with a sense of caution. The rise in the digital practices, was witnessed as an outcome of globalisation, when many artists, found opportunities to work and study abroad, where these practices had already established. One of the early exhibition, showing digital works of Indian artists, was, *The World Wide Video Festival* in Amsterdam, 1998. It showed the works, *Couples and House / Boat*, that Vivan Sundaram had made in 1994 in Canada, the performance *Is It What You*

*Think?*, 1998 by Rummana Hussain, and *Memory-Record/Erase*, 1996 by Nalini Malani.<sup>31</sup>



Figure 4-48: Vivan Sundaram, *Boat*, 1994. Kalam Khush handmade paper, steel, wood, video

Vivan Sundaram's, *House/Boat*, plays at two levels, one of the actuality of living and the constant threat one faces, and yet manages to survive. The sculptures are separate works, a set of enlarged models, giving a feeling of being real and functional (Figure 4-48). The house is a minimal space, with a bare light exterior, and a dark interior. In it is a container, with steam coming out. A closer look reveals a video running in a loop, showing burning furniture; possibly a site of a riot. Here Sundaram, tries to state that even as turmoil and threat exists, one tends to protect and provide for the family. Near it is the boat, with just the mast, and a footboard like structure, nearly welcoming the people. These could be migrants, refugees, or even those trying to flee the site of danger. Sundaram, plays with the title at two levels, one of the enjoyable notion of a house-boat, a tourist attraction, and other of homelessness, where the boat depicts the temporary shelter for those, who possibly could be reaching a home.

Malani's New Media piece *Memory: Record/Erase*, was inspired by a story written by Bertolt Brecht. She narrates a story of a woman, who on the death of her husband, imposed as a man. To take up a job as his replacement. To make the disguise full-proof, she also marries a woman, and has a wife. After

a few years, her secret is discovered, and she loses the job to a man. Malani's most significant video installations is *Remembering Toba Tek Singh*, 1998, made in response to the nuclear tests in India on 11 May 1998. The conflict between Pakistan and India is depicted through four large video projections on three walls and twelve videos encapsulated inside travelling trunks on the floor. Work shuttles between the beautiful and the gory. Images of women, tossing sarees, and the rhythmic gesture, provides a beautiful picture, before the mushroom cloud of nuclear explosion and destruction, surface. The both the works, the painterly treatment of the video marks a continuity of her temperament as a painter.

Rumanna Hussain through, *Is It What You Think?* 1998, a performance aimed at questioning constructs which have acted as suppressive elements to females of a particular religion. In the performance, the artist read out text primarily questions, written by her on the similar issues of religion, the female body, contradiction of questioning etc. The work also had projections of images in which *burkha* clad girls were shown holding guns. The work expanded the notions of authorship, by including herself in the work. Further the projected video on her, marked her / self-presence, in the reading of the work. Given the same, the notion of digitextuality, gets loaded, not just with the visual, and the digital projection of the video, but also with the physicality of the human body form as a reality within it. This could be considered as her attempt was to create an interface of directness of addressing the viewers.

Each of these works marked an expansion of the participation of the viewer from being an entity standing at a distance from the work of art, a strict line between the work and the viewer, but now as the one moving within its spatial spread and extending an auditory response too. Another important aspect which needs to be considered here is that of temporality. A static work in the conventional sense made itself available for the viewing uniformly – unchanged. At any given point of time one could stand and see the same works, without any temporal constraints. Video works on the other hand with a specific run-time, brought in a sense of non-static parameter. Though the same work would be run in a loop there was an inbuilt time specification to see any visual

frame, thereby bringing in the notion of beginning and the end of the work, in a constantly repetitive manner. At the same time these works could be reconfigured, in different places, in different manners, such that it need not be the same visual to witness, if desired by the artist.

#### 4.7.3 *Beyond the Temporal and Space Constraints*

The notions of temporality and spatial logic found a drastically different connotation, through the introduction of the virtual space and the web-based technologies. This also brought about a far reaching and interacting interface with the viewers. It could be said that the internet provided artists with limitless possibilities. Primarily, that of moving away from the gallery space, which provides a limited time of display and also the necessity of the visitors to come and see the work. Designing and hosting the works on the internet provided a virtual space allowing the artists to make the entire interface dynamic. The concept of dynamism can be understood in various ways. One, of the possibilities for the works to undergo alterations – like deletion or additions to the existing content, according to the will of the artist. It could be said that this space acts as an archival space too. The viewer if engaged with the work has the possibility of associating with the work repeatedly. Most of the internet based works, have an interactive value, and cater to the techno-savvy audience. One of the short-comes of these works, is that of the digital divide. As discussed in the second chapter, the gap between the provision of access to the technology, the lack of knowledge of accessing it, and the very knowledge of existence of such works, acts as disadvantages to the same. Yet many artists, have successfully been able to break the barriers and boundaries, to present these works.

Mithu Sen's, ongoing online interactive project. The page has running text – *Summer Dhamaka!...Free Art from Mithu Sen.. Write a Letter with Love!*<sup>32</sup> It also provides an interactive phase, where users can log in, create an id, and constantly visit the site. She has also posted her address and telephone number to strike an interactive note with the users. Sen, insistently colours the site in a pink, which is associated with girlishness. As a feminist engagement

Sen adjust the jarring pink to break the feminine construct. Her aim of providing a free work of art, is an attempt of mocking the notions of collectibles, especially images of women. The images on the postcards, which she distributes, as responses to the mails receives are grotesque de-representations of her. He manipulates the images to create a sense of repulsive visuals. For example, of placing her face on a dark bare torso of a man, or sketching a moustache on herself.

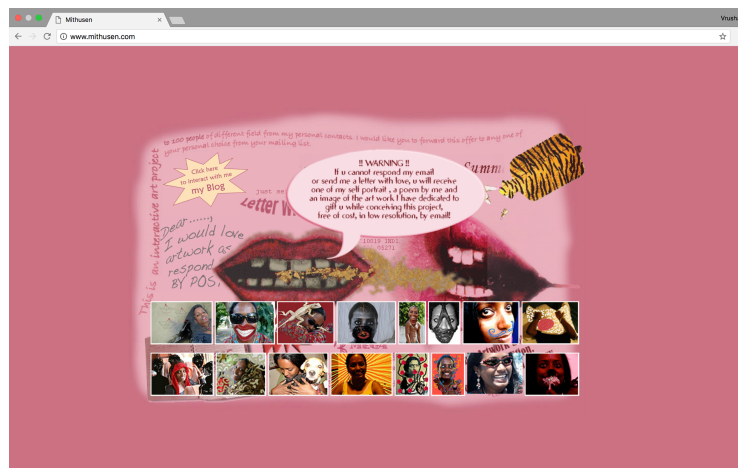


Figure 4-49: Mithu Sen. Ongoing online interactive project. Screenshot

At a primary level, she breaks the very constrain of – physically locating a work and making the viewer come to a gallery. Such that the availability of viewing the work without any time specifications, and also of the time for which it is available online. Finally granting a sense of control to the viewer as (s)he decides whether to continue the interaction or terminate the same. In terms of the visual aesthetics, the colours, running texts, and the manner of presentation, matches the pro-consumerist websites, aiming at luring the potential consumer with alluring offers.

Tejal Shah, on the other hand addresses specific issues, related to the representation of queer women. Through the online project titled, *Queer Women Take a Holiday: Participatory photography project open to public*, she aims at looking at the reception of images of those ‘women who love women’. With the term queer women, as stated on the website, she addresses concerns of - lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex and *hijra* identities (Shah, 1999-

2014). The aspect of the acceptance of their coexistence and the challenges faced by them, form the core concern for Shah. The need is to share the same.

In her project, she calls for the women, to share their experiences, to raise awareness about their state and also of knowing, how the experiences differ in different places. Having a global span, the site received input from individuals from different countries. Apart from problems, this particular project looked at the time, these couples spent happy times. They were requested to post images on the sites; near souvenirs of the same. In order to maintain their privacy, and at times their security, the artist provided four options to the contributors. One of fizzing out the faces, second of covering with a patch of colour, third, of choosing any public figure and replacing their faces with it, or fourth of posting the image as it was without any alterations. Earlier the images of the contributors were available for public viewing, but now have been withdrawn. Precisely the reason why no image is provided to support this written material in this section.

Both the works, are based on the voluntary response of the viewers, further mark the completion of the project only through the contributions from the participants. Such that the work, the artist and the visitor / viewer, strike a one to one correspondence. Every input from the viewer evokes a unique entity, which becomes a part of the archival material of these projects. Therefore, the viewer becomes responsible for building up the project.

#### *4.7.4 Oneness of the Work and the Viewer*

The works discussed earlier deal with the presence of a viewer as an entity which experienced the art works based on digital technology just as they would for any other website. Such that the presence of the viewer is not understood or dealt with in terms of their physicality. A different dimension to this is seen in the works of Subodh Gupta and Shilpa Gupta.

Subodh Gupta's work titled the *Cooking the World*, 2017, at the Art Basel Unlimited, presented a different understanding of the rural / local and



global, and that of the viewer, participant and ‘the guest’ (Figure 4-50; Figure 4-51). In this work, he inverted the very notion of a rural hutment, from a thatched hut to a tall towering shelter, that were made from aluminium utensils, previously used by someone. This to the artist are carriers or the marks of the past use, its own history. Suspended from fishing lines, the installation seemed like a large puppet house. Inside the space, was a large dining table, which the artist compared to a family space for sharing food; where the artist served Indian food to the visitors, adding the concept of mutual-tolerance. The notion of community food and sharing, marked an act of peaceful coexistence, as a part of the multicultural world.



*Figure 4-50: Subodh Gupta, Cooking The World, 2017. Aluminium utensils, steel, cable, wood, kitchen appliances dimensions variable*

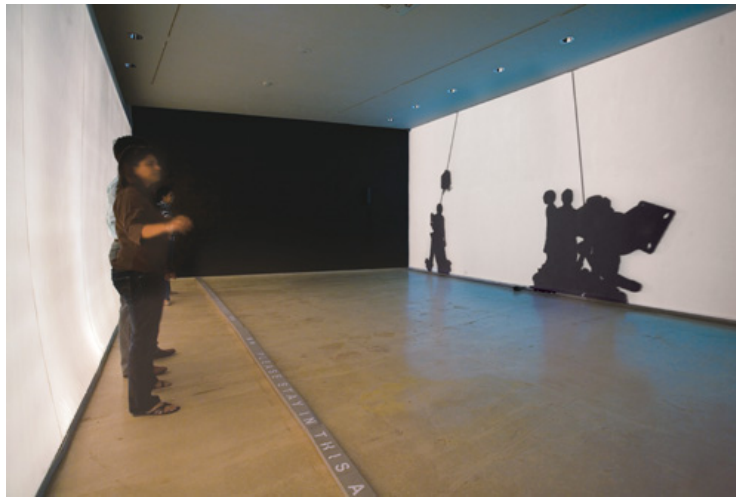


*Figure 4-51: Subodh Gupta, Cooking The World, 2017. Aluminium utensils, steel, cable, wood, kitchen appliances dimensions variable*

It could be said that the title hinted at the non-region-specific aspect of the work, where the typically regional was worked over, in a way appropriated to produce a visual which is purely global in taste. As we aim at finding what could be decidedly Asian or Indian about works of Indian artists in the contemporary practices, Gupta tries to create a dialogue by addressing the upbeat, chic, global and the regional and domestic simultaneously. Though not an outcome of a newer medium, the reason to include this work in the current section, is the way it changed the notion of a viewer coming to see the work. In *Cooking the World*, the visitors at the Art Basel, became participants contributing to the completion of the work. Such that the aim of sharing food, of a regional kind, to an international audience, attested the intended aim of multicultural coexistence. It would also be said that Gupta managed to reverse the role of these viewers, and not participants. By making them have the food, at the first level they become participants, and at the secondary level, with the artist overlooking their demands and engaged presence, the artist himself becomes the viewer and is viewing the participants who are now his 'guests'. This work reminds one of the Argentinian artist, Rirkrit Tiravanija's series title *Pad Thai*, of the 1990s. The artist in order to bring in oneness amongst the crowd or visitors, served freshly cooked food in the gallery. In the case of Subodh Gupta, the installation still acts an object of the work; whereas for Tiravanija, the aim was of breaking the object-ness of the work. There were no remains of her works, the food she cooked was consumed, thereby leaving no tangible trace, worth trading as an artwork.

Gupta in her interactive video works, *Shadow 3*, 2007, uses the presence of the viewer to complete it (Figure 4-52). The physical presence of the viewer is a necessity. She created a demarcated space, not a black box, but a partitioned space. The viewers were expected to walk in it, and stay within a marked space. On entering the viewers would see a long blank screen, which suddenly would project their own silhouette. It was not a shadow, as there is no light coming from the opposite direction, giving a sense of unease to the viewer. Suddenly a feeling of surveillance, and being monitored would cross the minds. Further, shadows of some unidentifiable objects would descend on the visitors. Via live video capture, their shadow becomes active content in the video projection, -

out of more shadows emerge, feed them, walk out of, dive into, crouch and sit on top.



*Figure 4-52: Shilpa Gupta, Shadow 3, 2007. Interactive video projection incorporating the viewers simulated shadow*

The text to the work, highlights the perplexities in the minds of these visitors. An unease of being monitored, of not being asked permission about, and some also of childlike enjoyments. The simultaneous presence of the many people in the space, would lead to the desire for locating oneself, literally in the crowd. Shilpa Gupta, with the work, strips off the visitor of the power of control, as seen in the case of the works based on the internet technology. The viewer now, is not just an ‘experiencer’ of the work, with the expansion of the sensorial responses, but contributes by becoming a part of the very ‘content’ of the work; such that the absence of the viewer leaves the work as an incomplete still space.

#### **4.8 Human Concerns: Steps beyond Borders**

Globalisation is credited for bringing economies of varying sizes together for a mutually beneficial coexistence. Given the interconnectedness, the risks of external factors playing on the domestic scene rose drastically. At the same time, there was a positive possibility of getting help from international bodies, in cases of domestic crisis. A similar tendency can be read through various fields, with individuals from different geographic regions found

concerns to address in a cohesive manner regardless of the fact that the participants were unknown to each other. The 1999 Seattle protest, discussed in the first chapter was emblematic of the same. To state a few examples, global warming, a phenomenon having a larger impact, is being looked upon as a serious problem to be dealt with in immediacy. Different forums formed by organisations, or even individuals have been able to draw likeminded people together to work in tandem towards understanding these causes. These could range from general concerns like those of the economic liberalisation policies and state of farmers in the less developed countries or of the state of children in some specific regions. A similar case can be witnessed in the rising global concerns towards the children of Sub-Saharan Africa. With the belief that global businesses exploited the natural resources, and economic benefits of the region, by hegemonic counterparts, the children in this region have been deprived of the basic facilities. The concerns towards their nutrition, education, very basic sanitation and most importantly their protection against child labour and violence, have been matters addressed by individuals and organisations not just from the region but globally. Or of the mass kidnapping of young girls by the Boko Haram group in Nigeria. The same is seen in attempts towards the betterment of the life of citizens of Afghanistan, especially women and children, during and after the fall of Taliban. What is necessary to note, is the manner in which there have been reactions and actual actions being taken by bodies of varying sizes and types to address these issues. As stated in the very first chapter, that globalisation did manage to get people together, be it for their immediate concerns or of generalised larger ones.

One of the factors which has played a crucial role in the facilitation of such cohesive efforts, is the advancement in the communication technology. As discussed elaborately in the first chapter, the advancement in technology leading to the ICT revolution, made it possible for people to have a democratic platform for participation. Of course, we cannot exclude the possibilities of government and institutional restrictions on posting information on the internet, and filtering of the same, as precautionary or direct measures. The virtual space nevertheless, proved beneficial as a primary step towards reaching beyond the

regional and temporal limits, to get varied reactions, responses, and establishment of ties towards specific concerns.

Since our current project deals with understanding the impact globalisation has had in various ways, the notion of the individual – collective, and collaborative, form an extremely important part. It need not mean that one has to have ties with some body elsewhere, but of being able to draw relevance or an understanding towards what might not be of one's immediate concern. Therefore, in this section we shall begin by understanding notions of global concerns. It could be said that moving from an individual level concerning either lived experiences or of those related to personal identities, another aspect of globalisation has been of the development of a 'global sensibility'. Such that, the need to react, emote and at times act towards global issues, has become emblematic of the tendency of a connected world. Globalism while providing a justification and critique of the new scenario has to an extent, although extremely low, been able to create a sense of universality, which has been successful to create a sense of cohesion above geographical demarcations. The same can be understood through various reactions of artists; further attesting the plurality of expressions, which hold equal validity. In some cases, there have been reactions to the current and contemporary issues, whereas in others it could be from the historic past, where the re-presentation of the same, is not of striking a note of remembrance but as to warning against repetition of such disasters.

#### *4.8.1 Between the Mediatic and the Mediated*

When speaking of humanitarian concerns, it seems evident that the notion of global sensibility and sensitivity, tends to take a centre-stage over the analysis of the analysis of the causal factors. The outcome in this case is of core concern. T. V. Santhosh explores the nature of various happenings and events especially in relation to the notion of terror and some with respect to technological advancements backed with irrational applications. Terrorism, has evidently been one of the pressing issues, which have affected many countries regardless of their military might, or economic supremacy. The loss of number of lives and the subsequent rising fear towards such fateful happenings has been

a matter of not just concern but fear for individuals. Such that, regardless of one's country or region, the fear towards it holds the same intensity. To the artist, the concern then is no longer a consequence of a certain happening, but is a general phenomenon of humanitarian addressing. Given which, he addresses the consequential emotions and imprints on the human psyche, that act as a connecting thread for those who experienced it, over those of specific happening. At this juncture, it is important to mention, that the conventional identity of the sufferers is not of importance, as the factor that defines them, is their new identity, as those who have faced similarly dark circumstances.



Figure 4-53: T. V. Santhosh, *A Story of a City Square*, 2011. Oil on canvas

In some works, Santhosh draws sources from mediatic images- from newspapers, magazines or the television, and transforms, into neutral images, them by stripping them of their specificities, to give a near universal appeal (Figure 4-53). Santhosh does this by giving them an effect of partially developed photographic negatives. Now these images lose their character of documents of particular events. This is done by using electric green, neon yellow and shocking orange oil paint to paint these images. He appropriates these news reports with a near photographic reality.<sup>33</sup> The media according to the artist is the only source which common people rely on, to get information from; given which, it becomes the first face of the facts, regardless of its validity. Santhosh by altering these images, by repainting them as negatives, raises two issues. One dealing with the manipulation of the events by the media, and the other of an 'universal appeal'. Such that one is bound to question, as to, - is the face of terror different in different land? Does a blast evoke different

reactions in different countries? Does death through such events look different?  
He mentions that,

In my works, I do not intend to mirror any political undercurrents but to surface parallel realities surpassing the local specificities. For instance the very word ‘terror or terrorism’ is no longer alien to us. We no longer need to make an extra effort to empathize or take cognizance of such unruly activities faced by, say, individuals from different countries, we are no longer hit by a level of shock, as now we are living constantly and simultaneously in worlds which are afflicted by these common issues (Dhage, *The Visible and Beyond*, 2009).

At the same time, the painterly treatment of the visual, moves it beyond the inherent repulsive aspect of terror. The artists claims, that while viewing documented images of people ravaged in wars or deeply wounded, our instantaneous reaction is usually of repulsion; but a painting of it might not evoke a same reaction or hit on the same sensory note. The effect is mitigated by a huge margin. To take it further, one might be drawn towards such images in order to explore the detailing of it. Thereby Santhosh moves from a contextual depiction of events to a generalised de-contextualised level. The reworked image with its bright colours and a glowing character, aims not at providing a gory detailed reality, but an image which one can hold on, to see carefully and not feel repelled and, further a visual to contemplate on.





Figure 4-54: T. V. Santhosh, *A Room to Pray*, 2008. fibreglass, LED screens, steel plexiglass, size variable, edition of 3

A sculptural work of Santhosh titled, *A Room to Pray*, 2008, addresses a similar notion of fear (Figure 4-54). In this case he looks at the notion of progress and its destructive effects, over that of terrorism. From a distance, the work which has been recreated in variable sizes, looks like a pristine white space; given which the title reminds us, that it could be a small space for individuals to pray in peace or even to make confessions. In the centre is a long white table, giving a semblance of an altar space, and a deep pink glow, lights the inner and outer area. As one walks closer, the picture changes drastically. The white space starts unveiling showing that it is made from bones, suddenly raising a sense of unease. The screens, and the pixel-glass, reveal a text being run on. It is the testimony of a fourteen-year-old boy, Yoshitaka Kawamoto, who survived the Hiroshima bombing. The text states, the initial feeling of awe she experienced on seeing the mushroom cloud and the intense light. And later as she came to consciousness, witnessed piles of corps, under which she laid alive. The room is an evidence of the inhuman acts and the consequent gruesome sufferings. The table, to the artist is a reference to The Last Supper, and the possible death of humanity. He also draws a similar reference to the destructive acts of the Bhopal Gas tragedy and the Chernobyl. These to the artists are just some examples of the errors in history, in which the notion of humanity was to be questioned, and learnt from. Referring back to the mediatic images, Santhosh believes, that even as such events keep occurring, the constant

rather relentless projection of the same has made us numb towards the very notion of inhuman acts.<sup>34</sup>

In this case even as the artist draws reference from a specific episode of history, by stating the testimony of the boy, it is important to note that the concern is not to address that specific episode. In another work, based on the same concept, the artist withdraws the given reference and builds a neutral space, for the viewers to contemplate, and interpret it without limiting or guiding them. Thereby, letting the non-referential, universal sensibility play a role in understanding and interpreting it.

#### 4.8.2 *Addressing the 'immediate'*

It would be repetitive to say that artists are influenced by the factors that play on them through their spaces of proximate interactions. At the same time, one has to take cognisance that the notion of immediacy is also fed by the temporally immediate, regardless of the regional dissimilarities. Since our current interest revolves around understanding the notion of a global tendency, over that which represents a regional, or country specific, and or even parochial manners of divisions, the constant reading of the attempts by artists to crossover these norms, attest the notions of the growing universalising sensibility. Given which the understanding of the 'immediate' moves beyond the geographical tropes, of spaces to that of immediate emotive and immediate temporal.



Figure 4-55: Atul Dodiya, *Woman from Kabul*, 2001. Acrylic and marble dust on fabric

Atul Dodiya, to whom the notions of contemporaneity and the need to be a part of the updated present, is supplemented with the representation of the same through his works. Having a predilection for the popular and the known, he conjures images from the immediately available. His works oscillate between those of intense and pensive, to that of a quizzical and humorous; most of which having images with which one is usually visually acquainted. His work titled, *Woman From Kabul*, 2001, shows a woman, presumably of an elderly one, as she squats at a spot (Figure 4-55). The pinkish face with detailed features is the only part that is partially naturalistic. It is only the title which gives an idea of who she could be.

A first look at the work, and two aspects show out aloud. The deep black part of the *burkha*, covering her head, and the other of her skeletal structure. Gazing ardently in a particular direction, she is unaware of the viewer. Her gaze, seems to be looking for something at a distance; could it be a person or an object, or a mode of transportation? The brown object in her hand resembles a bag, presumably of her possessions; hinting that the woman is desirous of going somewhere, or being somewhere else; further hinting that she could be a

refugee. The time when Dodiya made this work, was when the Islamic fundamentalist group, Taliban, had captured major parts of Afghanistan, and were imposing laws and new ways of functioning, on the pretext of their coherence with the religion. One of the law made it mandatory for women to cover themselves in a *burkha*. Many cases were reported of publically assaulting and consequent deaths of women who refused or in some ways failed to adhere to these rules. The skeletal structure of the woman, presented in a near surgical way, could represent the freedom with which the rules were imposed on them; and at worse, even violence. Even as her body stands bare, her head remains covered, hinting at the same.

Along with the woman, a tree, nearly dead, and like the woman, made from skeletal structure curves over her, failing to give her any shade. The green, around her which could be her skin or her body, finds a similar translation with the dead tree, as a green creeper encircles it. At the same time, her body is stripped, literally, to the bone. At one level this could be considered as an actuality of the state of women in Kabul, or could be the state of those refugees, wanting to flee from the place. The backdrop of the beautiful wallpaper like image, could be representative of the rich and cosmopolitan history Afghanistan had over the centuries. One could say that Dodiya presents an image of the land, which once in history was a seat of proliferation for different religions, philosophical and artistic traditions and in the then current time was reduced to a war-ravaged zone, where traces of the earlier were being erased, both as physical remnants and also the ideological followings.

Vivan Sundaram, addressed the 1992, post-Babri Masjid riots, in India, through a sculptural installation titled, *Memorial* (Figure 4-56). Different component filled up the available gallery space; majority of them resembling the glass encased museum exhibits. These were hinting at the past, which has been preserved, either as a sweet memory or a reminder of a scar. As one walked through the space, which looked like an abandoned scape, one came across a sculpture of a man, laying down, certainly not sleeping, but an awkward posture and still. He white body clearly hinted at death; and the man lay abandoned, unattended and dead. Sundaram, further encased his body, in a glass shell, with

lights focusing on the man, as though a specimen of the gruesome act (Figure 4-57). The riots which marked murder of not just humans, but the spirit of cosmopolitanism. The work then stands as a memorial, of the episode, the killing, and the deaths of all those who died unnoticed.



Figure 4-56: Vivan Sundaram, *Memorial*, 1993. An installation with photographs and sculpture. Exhibition view



Figure 4-57: Vivan Sundaram, *Memorial* (detail), 1993. Steel, glass, neon light with white inlaid marble, plaster cast of a live body

Inder Salim, through his performance titled, *I Protest*, 2010, commented on the outrage over the death of a boy, who was shot during a protest in his state of Kashmir (Figure 4-58). During the protest, stone pelters had covered their faces with handkerchiefs, to hide their identity. The protest in Kashmir and the



death of the boy, was followed by another protest in Delhi. The artist in his performance, covered his face with a handkerchief, posing as a stone pelter. He picked a paper, with text 'I Protest' printed on it. Then crushed the paper and posed as though he was about to throw the stone, as an act of an attack. To Salim, this was an act of recreating the event, yet in a peaceful manner, an act of protest in itself (Kapur, 2013).

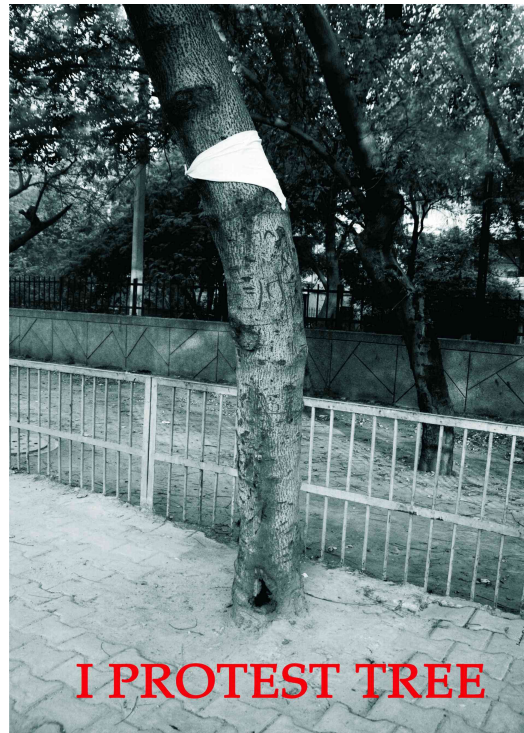


Figure 4-58: Inder Salim, *I Protest*, 2010.

#### 4.8.3 Critiquing the Inhuman

The 1990s, witnessed various political happenings which made one recollect the horrid images of the two destructive wars, and the fear that the same might repeat. This was predominantly due to the Gulf War. the dominance of the US, the display of its military might, was viewed with ambiguity; questioning the very necessity of the same. The death, destruction and the torture of various military convicts, was critiqued. The reactions were not restricted to those who belonged to the targeted land but from various parts of the world. One such artist is Susan Crile, a US based artist. Crile's work of the 1970s mainly dealt with landscapes, in 1980s she moved towards a more abstract tendency. The 1990s, according to her made her move out of her

engagement with the formal, towards a more political expression. This was also the time when the media was constantly producing images and footages from the war front, most of which were extremely unpleasant; what she calls as the ‘effluvia of imagery’. The sheer volume was such that there seemed to be a race of producing or presenting the latest image; such that each image within no time was replaced by another.



*Figure 4-59: Susan Crile, Threatened, 2005. white chalk, pastel and charcoal on paper*

To Crile this inundation of images could be interpreted as constant reminder to the vulnerability of the conditions to which the common people were subjected to. The political horrors, led to the suffering of the masses. Given the same, Crile felt the need to react to the same. Beginning from the 1991, Gulf War, her expressions reflect an element of ‘protest’ as she focuses specifically on the atrocities against the prisoners of Iraq war, in the early 2000s. This is seen in her series named, Abu Ghraib (Figure 4-59). A place which was infamous for its prison, and the atrocities the US Army inflicted on the prisoners.<sup>35</sup> There were extreme cases on inhuman treatment of these people. Many of them were women and teenagers too, and many mistakenly detained. The torture was provided a rational by the US, and not relegated as an act of injustice. The intensity and methods to torture were such that the city became emblematic of the same. The deaths of the convicted Iraqis due to these harsh



tortures were extremely high. Her works focus on the ways in which the processes of interrogation were carried, and the way in which the convicts would be left in unliveable conditions.

At an aesthetic level Crile found it a challenge. With a time dominated by the huge influx of digital images, it was difficult to make a work of art which would move the viewers. Therefore, instead of choosing a direct representation, Crile choose beauty as a point of entry, by a painterly treatment of the bodies involved; such that a closer look would reveal an immediate sense of repulsion. The notion of threat, fear, pain, restlessness and haplessness, are evident as the powerless convicted entities, give in submissively.



Figure 4-60: G. R. Iranna, *The Dead Smile*, 2007. Fibreglass and cloth

A similar work is of G. R. Iranna, unlike Crile where the reference to the work is specific, and based on factual information, Iranna looks at a more de-contextualised understanding of oppression and political or social victimisation. Like Crile his approach too begins with his engagement with the notion of beauty. His work titled *Dead Smile*, 2007, is a cluster of sculptures (Figure 4-60). Men with a perfectly crafted body, reminiscent of the Greek ideal body types, with a flawlessly bright skin take the centre-stage. These are the possible protagonists, but certainly not the powerful; as they squat with their bare, nude bodies, with their faces covered with a black cloth. The posture, the nude body and the covered head, hint at them being wither, prisoners of war, or some refugees or of a similar type. Many such men, seem to be forced to sit

together. They could have been stripped bare, to avoid them from fleeing, or for torturing them, or some form of abuse, or before execution. Their clustered positioning and covered faces, reminds one of a camp or a prison setting. The ideal sculpted body type makes it clear that they are certainly not people who have been slaves or workers deprived of food, and forced into captivity. These individuals seem to have been recently got there. Evidently the posture and the body stand in opposition to the meanings they convey.

Iranna strikes a constant note of contrast through this work. Firstly, of portraying the beauty of the physical details, with the haplessness of the posture and submission. The title speaking of the death in the smile, itself holds the ironic character, as neither is the face visible nor the smile, further the bared and enslaved body, barely seems to have the desire or the capability to smile. To Iranna, this work stands as a comment on the inhuman measures humans undertake to ensure the protection of humanity. Though the work itself was not based on any specific episode, it can certainly seem to be a face of various such sites which claim to be the protecting bodies.

#### **4.9 Modes, Destinations, Processes and Manners of Circulating Art**

Dealing with the very process of art making, as seen earlier, is fed by numerous influences, be it individual and collective experiences, material inclinations, desires for derisions and experimentation, one time site, occasion or intent specific outcomes, the ideological leanings, be it influenced by globalisation or not, and the work itself, are invariably held in the realm shared by the work and the artist; before the works gets presented to another eye for viewing. It still remains as an entity held in the grip of the artist, associated with a given intent as thought about by the artist, based on which the work was conceptualised and consequently executed. If has to be put romantically, it could be said that the umbilical cord is still intact and not cut away. The entering of the work in the public realm, marks a certain departure from the sole association of the work to the given intent of the artist.

It now becomes open to a multiplicity of references and reactions; the validity of which highlights the very subjectivity of reception and interpretation of the works. At this juncture, it is important to note that the notion of public sphere is not restricted to a homogenous entity, based on regional, cultural or social similarities. The globalised world, with borders playing a lesser role, it means that the works would be opened to a space much wider and plural, than that perceived earlier. Further the possibility of circulation of works away from the space of its origin, brings the possibility of constant re-contextualisation of the work. This can be understood in two ways. Firstly, the re-contextualisation, or re-reading of the work based on the varying backgrounds and perceptions of the viewers; such that, as the work travels through various geographic spaces. Secondly, based on the manner of its presentation, that is, the politics of projection. It is this second aspect which is of our current interest. The re-contextualisation of works, backed by the intent of presenting them under a particular conceptual structure is predominantly seen, in the large-scale shows, especially the ones which recur after a specific time, like the triennials and the biennales.

These large-scale events, have become a favoured ground for exhibiting a tendency, ranging from eclecticism to expansive accommodation. The postmodern plurality and multiplicity, are then considered as a necessary partner of the globalised world, where the politics of positionalities tend to create a space with assimilative characteristics. These spaces have become grounds for circulating works of art; further adding to the intricate web of connections, on which the art world functions. Therefore, in this section we shall trace the increasing frequency with which these large-scale exhibitions took place; later focusing on the participation of Indian artists. As these exhibitions started gaining increasing space of prominence, a consequent need for structuring these exhibitions was witnessed, thereby contributing to the increasing importance of the profession of curators.

#### *4.9.1 The New World Order and the Art World*

As witnessed earlier, after the Cold War, and the global events post 1989 – be it the reunification of Germany, the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, the rise of the global trade agreements, the consolidation of the trading blocs, the tilting of the earlier conservative economies of the East, especially the earlier colonised ones towards capitalism and the subsequent rise of the Asian and South East Asian countries as the new emerging economies, implied that the economics of the art world too was bound to react to these changes. Given which, there was an evident reconfiguration of the art world too (Stallabrass, 2006, pp. 7-8). As discussed elaborately in the third chapter. The model which operated with the Euro-American focus was witnessing a slow movement, drift, though not of a direct departure from the earlier model, but of the assimilation of the entities which till now were placed on the margins of the art world. These included the African, Caribbean, Asian art, and similar examples which had earlier proven to be sources of inspiration for the western artists, but had never received an independent space within the western canons of art.

Of particular interest is the transformation that came about in order to accommodate this notion of cultural equality. This has to be understood in two specific ways – firstly of recognising and giving due cognisance to these art forms as independent practices, and the other of stating the same in a mindful and logical manner, rather than portraying the same as an attempt to elevate them. One of the ways in which the latter was undertaken was by holding large-scale shows with a broad spectrum. Most of these shows were intended to hold a non-region-specific outlook, further having a dominant educative stance over that of mere visual delight. Interestingly most of these early large-scale shows were hosted in the Euro-American centres, which were longstanding epicentres of the art world.

The earlier mentioned changes in the global order brought about new demands – economic, political and ideological, and consequently affect the field of art by leading to the expansion of the international exhibitionary system. This was coupled with the rising interest in the viewing and display of these works

of art apart from the North American and the Western European regions in these regions itself. This attitude attested the rising notion of multiculturalism which was finding palpable presence across the globe (Phaidon Editors & Altshuler, 2013, p. 18). Though the notion of multiculturalism found great impetus with the large-scale migrations and constant movement of people as transnationals in the globalised era, its roots can be traced in some of the attempts, undertaken in the early 1980s. When analysing these changes, from the vantage point of economic factors, these proved to be attempts of recognising the potential, emerging options and of giving an assurance of equality. Whereas from the social and cultural viewpoint these were attempts of exhibiting the multicultural tendency which had already found manifestations as live examples, through the diasporas in various forms. The need was now to not just recognise the existence of these multiple entities but of presenting them in a rational and unbiased way. It could be said that a lot had to be undone, to shed the longstanding way in which they were viewed.

It meant that the works of art from these earlier marginalised regions would have to be presented not just as emblems from the respective lands; as souvenirs, of the exotic or primitive, but now had to be looked upon as representatives of the contemporaneity. The need would be to shed of the existing burden or even worse a prejudice of relegation, which for long had overlooked their importance, never granting them a position of the mainstream art.

This brings us back to the very notion of viewing works. Given the background and the actuality of the globalised world, it is this aspect of reception of the work which has gained increasing attention over the past few decades. The notion of reception is no longer restricted to that of viewing the works of art as presented by the artists. Now, with boundaries, time periods, various economies, technological advancements and socio-cultural fabrics playing an unavoidably necessary role, the works are bound to be exposed to a multiplicity of reactions. Since we are concerned about the time period from the late 1980s rather early 1990s, one can draw a direct parallel between the notion of global movement with respect to businesses and individuals, to that of the

circulation of works across borders. As the various factors contributing to the establishment of economic ties globally and the consequent establishment of networks of mobility and exchange, aided the expansion and reach of various functional entities, there were varied reactions towards such global movements. And yet there was a common understanding that it was necessary rather inevitable to be a part of the connected world; which meant that one would have to look beyond the regional and the conventionally held hegemonic bodies and move towards the new, 'emerging' entities in the field of art, just as was the case with the economic ones.

#### *4.9.2 Large-scale Exhibitions and Early Attempts Towards Assimilative Tendency*

The project of assimilation of the earlier peripheral entities meant that it was bound to be broad and large in character. This would range from the scope and premise of discussion to that of selection of artists befitting the same. A small or weak selection of artists would spell an incomplete attempt. Therefore, the tool which helped crossing borders and justifying the inclusion of art from different lands and time under a singularly broad understanding, was the concept of large-scale exhibitions. Unlike the widely practiced format of shows - of individual artists, which in the 1960s or 1970s were meant for a specific crowd or individuals; or those of groups with a decided agenda, bracketed under a near homogenous category, the large-scale exhibitions provided scope for accommodating heterogeneous works of art together, without making them look incongruent. Artists and art works from different time periods, geographies or ideologies, could be included, providing a wider spectrum of works to be seen. At the same time, there would be a conceptual link connecting these works, thereby justifying their clustering for one exhibition. These were to be based on a research oriented approach and thereby moved from the pure retinal logic of viewing works to that of reading them through various perspectives and contexts.

At this juncture, we would not be discussing the absolute validity of the same, as many such exhibitions failed to accommodate and attain the desired

character; and were evidently criticised for the same; whereas some exhibitions became pioneering examples. Unlike, *The Great Exhibition* of 1851, which had a decided intent of exhibiting its powers of the rule in terms of industrial supremacy and also the exotic collections from the colonised lands, the exhibitions showing works of contemporary art were to be devoid of such a direct competitive tone. Though sometimes it was insinuated, but over the period there has been a general tendency of adopting an all-encompassing, unbiased outlook.

This change can be traced by studying exhibitions which are early exemplars of the same and also give an idea of the way in which these exhibitions were received. Before venturing into the analysis of the exhibitions, one has to keep in mind that this wasn't the beginning point for the large-scale exhibitions. Various shows were being held in museums since long. Majority of these were still focusing on the works created by the European and American artists. In cases of inclusion of artists from other than the West, especially Asian or African art, meant that there would be an evident tilt towards highlighting the quotient of - the traditional, ritualistic, religious which would be having an otherworldly function associated to it; in opposition to the factual and rational modernist project characterised by the West.

Therefore, the exhibitions which we shall be discussing are the ones in which artists from different countries especially the ones with a colonial past, were included. Some of these exhibitions at least had a decided intent of not portraying the non-Euro-American art as those of the exotic Other. The validity of which, through the manner of executing it, came under strict critical analysis. An early example of the same was an exhibition titled *Primitivism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern*, 1984 was housed at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. It had two hundred and eighteen tribal objects and one hundred and forty-seven works of modern and contemporary art. These works of the tribal and the modern, which were till then categorised differently, were intentionally placed besides each other, to counter the long-applied methods of segregating works. Focused on tracing influences shared by these forms of art, the show intentionally seemed to have overlooked the



ethnographic relevance. The parameters and methodologies undertaken clearly reflected an adherence to the Western canons of aesthetics and art history, over that of giving due cognisance to the multiple traditions followed by these artists respectively. Thomas McEvelley strongly criticised the curatorial stand and the responsibility of MoMA, through his review,

Indeed, it *is* an important event. It focuses on material that bring with them the most deeply consequential issues of our time. And it illustrates, without consciously intending to, the parochial limitations of our world view and the almost autistic reflexivity of Western civilisation's modes of relating to the culturally Other (Doctor Lawyer and Indian Chef, 2003, p. 335).<sup>36</sup>

Even as this exhibition was one of the early attempts to break the presumed notion of the hegemonic West and the recipient East / Other, it invariably faced criticism for holding a 'paternalistic attitude' towards tribal art (Phaidon Editors & Altshuler, 2013, p. 283); and being blinkered by the canons of Western aesthetics and also of the colonialist outlook, with the deep-rooted faith of superiority of the West, which was evidently visible through the exhibition. McEvelley further criticised the appropriating stance of the project by stating how the works of artists like Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Matisse, who deviated from the set Western rules, drew influences from African, Oceanic and Native cultures. Here he criticises the attitude of presentation based on the very title of the exhibitions, such that, the need was to state the 'affinities' and not respect the other traditions in their actuality and as independent practices.

The fact that the primitive "looks like" the Modern is interpreted as validating the Modern by showing that its values are universal, while at the same time projecting it, - and with it MoMA, into the future as a permanent canon. A counterview is possible: that primitivism on the contrary invalidates Modernism by showing it to be a derivative and subject to external causation.

At one level this show undertakes precisely to coopt that question by answering it even before it has really been asked, and by burying it under the mass of information...Clearly the organisers of this exhibition want to present Modernism not as an appropriative act but as a creative one... This theme has become a standard in dealing with primitivism. (McEvelley, *Doctor Lawyer and Indian Chef*, 2003, pp. 340-341)

McEvelley, further states that the organisers might have feared that the strength of the works might have reverse the very intention of their exhibition. It is interesting to note that the review focuses on points that speak of crucial issues like the notions of validation, the granting of a specific status, of management of knowledge and information, retention of the hegemonic and legitimising status, and most importantly of presenting the exhibition in a convincing manner. As seen earlier these were also the underlying tenets on which the globalise world was setting its parameters, rather equations of functioning. One is reminded of Lyotard, and the notion of self-legitimation, and the circulation of knowledge.

Just as, *Primitivism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinities of the Tribal and the Modern*, faced opposing reactions, a few other exhibitions of such a range and scope faced it in their own right. We shall look at two exhibitions which were held a few years after the mentioned exhibition. Unlike *Primitivism*, which in itself was an early attempt and thereby bound to reflect the earlier existing tendencies of viewing and contextualising art, these later ones came at a time when the notions of multiculturalism had started finding expression in fields other than art. The voice of the decolonised was being heard, the postcolonial studies had started finding formal presence in academic institutions, the economic and political stratification of the world, in the post-Cold War phase, with attempts of global consolidation and the rising importance of the Third World, made various scholars relook and rethink the relevance of the conventional centre-periphery / margin model. Therefore, the consequent attempts were not mere emotional or compassionate attempts to heal the scars of the Third World, but at the least, have to be considered as attempts to open

channels of exchange. This was done with due notice that the Third World was itself gaining an independent identity, and in the rapidly globalising world these barriers would necessarily have to be broken.

One of the exhibition was titled *The Other Story* and was held at London's Hayward Gallery, it was guest curated by an artist Rasheed Araeen. The other was titled as *Magiciens de la Terre* (Figure 4-61), was held at Centre Georges Pompidou and Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris. It was curated by Jean-Hubert Martin. Both the exhibitions were held in 1989. There were similar attempts of such kind being made at various levels. In a way hinting at the urgency of building up an assimilative tendency based on the character of non-hierarchical bias, of cultural equality and a deep-rooted need to highlight the conscious attempts being made towards the same. Even as these seemed to be honest attempts, and on one hand were being lauded, on the other, at the worse, they were being looked upon suspiciously as mere appropriations and a device of further attesting their hegemonic legitimising positions, through such disguised acts.



Figure 4-61: *Magiciens de la Terre*, 1989, Exhibition view

*Magiciens de la Terre*, or The Magiciens of the Earth, was one of the first shows to have included art from a global scale, especially as it gave equal emphasis to all the artists. *Magiciens*, had already had a prior example like *Primitivism*, to look and learn from. Jean-Hubert Martin<sup>37</sup> with a team of

curators, anthropologists, and regional specialists undertook a survey to determine the artists or works to be included in the exhibition. Since various notions of art practices, from the aesthetic to the ritualistic were considered by the team in the process of selection, a holistic approach was undertaken. Jens Hoffmann states that the curator,

...intended to counter to the ethnocentric, colonial mindset of Western contemporary art discourses at that time. Nearly as a reaction to the *Primitivism*, 1984, exhibition, which he believed epitomised prevailing exclusionary and myopic discourses, and ignored the particular qualities and contexts of the 'primitive' art works on display, such as the ritual value of objects in the belief systems of the makers...(it) was also a critique of the Paris Biennale, in which artworks and representatives of specific countries were selected based on France's own culture, thus strengthening the its hegemonic image of itself while marginalising most art hailing from non-Western countries (Show Time: The 50 Most Influential Exhibitions of Contemporary Art, 2014, pp. 96-97).

Martins desired for having a logical and just inclusion, was obvious as one sifts through the list of the artists. Though later it was criticised for an unnecessary insistence on inclusion of tribal and folk traditions from the non-Western world. For example, inclusion of works by Marina Abramović, Bowa Devi, Sigmar Polke, Rasheed Araeen the curator of *The Other Story*, Raja Babu Sharma, Jangarh Singh Shyam, and of the Aboriginal community of Yuendumu in one exhibition might seem incongruent, for someone unaware of the context within which the exhibition was structured.<sup>38</sup> It was criticised for the inclusion of artists from such a disparate background – some having excelled their works through the canons of Western modernism and on the other extreme those rooted in their cultural traditions. Similar to the criticism of the exhibitions like *Primitivism*, which was criticised further for exoticizing these artists, and undermining the notion of universalist aesthetics. For *Magiciens*, the same was proven by the usage of the word 'magic' in the very title of the exhibition. The

same criticism of being colonialist and paternalistic like *Primitivism* was faced by *Magiciens* too; to some it was a sheer collection of depoliticised artworks, each picked up and placed together with no real connecting thread. To counter this criticism, one has to consider Martin's understanding of the same. He stated in the catalogue essay that the 'magic' in the title described the 'influence exerted by these powerful and inexplicable' artworks. Considering the same, one could trace the departure from the tendency shown in *Primitivism*, of drawing parallels between two different practices, while holding the Western Modernist project as the point of reference. *Magiciens*, on the other hand, held no comparative stand between these practices, but aimed at presenting them in their independent and own right.

The countering criticism towards the exhibition can be understood from two reactions one of Araeen and the other of McEvilley. While understanding Araeen's criticism one has to take into consideration his role as a participating artist, and an individual trying to locate the identity politics within the postcolonial debate and of gauging the transitions in the institutional approaches towards the art from the periphery. His analysis is a part of the then ongoing changes of the 1980s where the notion of non-white artists, institutional racialism and multiculturalism and plural societies were at the forefront. In his review on *Magiciens*, he states,

One would normally feel obliged to be grateful when one is actually a participant in such an international exhibition, but it is also essential that the paternalism of power must constantly be questioned if we are not to be imprisoned by its benevolence. My disappointment with the exhibition is not due to the quality of the work, or the display. In fact, the exhibition looks very attractive; almost all the works are given equal space and are arranged in such a way that in some cases it is difficult to distinguish visually between the "modern" and "traditional" ... My main criticism concerns the lack of any radical theoretical or conceptual framework that can justify togetherness of works

representing different historical traditions (Our Bauhaus Others' Mudhouse, 1989, pp. 3-14).

Even as Araeen found some inherent flaws in the conceptualisation of the exhibition, Thomas McEvilley in his review, states that a comparison of the *Magiciens* with the *Primitives* was futile, to him the inconsistencies and the incongruence of some of the works itself helped it from slipping into conventional cannons of the Western approach. Further McEvilley nearly requested its viewers to not burden this exhibition with the task of fulfilling a set goal, but of considering it as the 'first major postcolonial way to exhibit objects together...as a major event in the social history of art, not in its aesthetic theory.' He further locates the exhibition over the transforming time of the 1980s, "'Magiciens" opened the door of the long-insular and hermetic Western art world to artists...as we enter the global village of the 1990s, would any one of us really rather that the door remain closed? (The Global Issue, 1990)'

*The Other Story*, aimed at presenting artists from the Asian, African and Caribbean British artists. Twenty-four artists were selected.<sup>39</sup> Evidently the scale of the show was way smaller than the earlier one. Given the involvement of Araeen with radicalised political groups striving for representation, who having witnessed national liberation and some experienced the civil wars following the same; Araeen's attempt has to be analysed in the backdrop of his intention of persistently pushing art historical research which categorised artists by their ethnicity, while overlooking their formal, material, historical and philosophical aspects. Further criticising the projected element of folklore, ethnicity in the very projects undertaken to provide a space for such artists to practice and exhibit. Fisher Jean in a paper titled, *The Other Story and the Past Imperfect*, credits Araeen for tracing the relationship in visual arts and the visual practices of these artists who had a working presence and resided in the UK for over at least ten years, and, "had become not simply marginalised but 'whited out', as it were" (*The Other Story and the Past Imperfect*; Tate Papers No 12, 2009). Araeen while commenting on the same, also mentions that the lack of institutional support to the Black and Asian artists has also been a major reason

for their works to not have gained attention, thereby highlighting the near racial discrimination.

Julian Stallabrass analysed the role of Araeen, both as a practitioner, as an individual having faced the issues of representation and also as the curator of the exhibition. Further she highlights the locational significance of *Magiciens* in Pompidou.

Each was controversial and, as first forays into this area, necessarily partial. *Magiciens de la Terre*, in particular, was criticised for exoticizing Third World artists, an attitude expressed in its very title. Nevertheless, it was the first major exhibition in a metropolitan art-world centre to show contemporary First World and Third World art together on an equal footing. Rasheed Araeen fought against the indifference and condescension of the British art elite to produce *The Other Story*, which for the first time showed black and Asian British artists in a prominent public space. These exhibitions achieved a new visibility for contemporary artists of colour. And both – despite dears of Araeen, who after years of marginalisation rightly worried that his show might be no more than an isolated ‘curiosity’ in the white-out – proved to be heralds of a system under which non-white artists would no longer need complain of invisibility, and had to start worrying instead about the type of attention they were receiving. (Contemporary Art: A Very Short Introduction, 2006, p. 8)

#### 4.9.3 *Restructuring Institutions and Collaborating Venues*

One can evidently trace the rise in the number of large-scale exhibitions taking place across different countries. Further these shows were not simple representatives of the national or local art and artists, but have an expanding scope. Most of these aim at including artists not just from the home country but also from various other countries. This openness can be understood as a characteristic of the contemporary globalised world. Again, this is not to



assume, that the notion of the ‘flat world’ and a levelled single pedestal for participation and representation holds good, in this case. Nevertheless, it is an evident attempt to move away from the long-practiced notions of categorisations, divisions and segregations that have been followed as canons over the time. The new wave of large-scale shows invariably exhibited the character of the globalised world, based on the desire for exploring the emerging, the new – not the exotic, of having a fractional or cursory presence over that of the longstanding ties, and most importantly it exhibited the need for assimilative ties. One has to also take cognisance of the simultaneous development of the rising number of galleries and museums which started giving increasing attention to contemporary art.

Many the earlier existing museums on understanding the rising levels of interactions amongst countries started expanding their span of collection and also the scope of exhibition. Another factor which influenced the change in their working was the rising influences of technological progress. This was not just with respect to the general notions the same, for example the personal computer becoming a part of every household, but the use of these technologies based on the ICT, in the works of art. Considering the drastic and pervasive impact of the same, many galleries underwent a restructuring, either of their physical spaces, or their ways of working.<sup>40</sup> Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, which had been functioning since the 1935, made a formal division of its curatorial body into four teams, one specifically dedicated to the Media Arts.<sup>41</sup> Further in 1995 it became one of the earliest museums to launch its institutional website (SFMOMA, 2018), marking the adoption of technological tools not just in exhibiting and in functional logistics, but as a tool to make the global presence evident.

A similar transformation was undertaken by The Centre Pompidou, in the late 1980s, where influential international exhibitions were getting hosted. One of the significant exhibitions was *Magicians of the Earth*, 1989, which shall be discussed in detail in the latter section. The Centre also received government grant for its expansion to have more performance based works in the late 1990s (Pompidou, 2018). The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, which had a

long-standing presence in the field of art, with a vast collection, educational programs and shows, started expanding its facilities widely. Beginning from New York, housed in the Frank Lloyd Wright architecture from the 1940s, the museum expanded over various countries since then. In 1991 after signing an agreement with the Spanish authorities, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao opened in 1997. In the same year the Deutsche-Guggenheim partnership laid foundation to another exhibiting space in Berlin. A recent and significant step with respect to contemporary Asian art was the establishment of the Asian Art Initiative in 2006; and subsequently the Asian Art Council in 2007, to play an advisory role to the Initiative. In 2006, itself the Guggenheim Museum signed a MoU with the United Arabs Emirates government to establish the Guggenheim Museum Abu Dhabi focusing on modern and contemporary art.<sup>42</sup> In 1992 the Tate Trustees announced the creation of a separate gallery for international modern and contemporary art in London. The structure was opened in May 2000, and has played a crucial role in collecting and exhibiting works of international art.<sup>43</sup>

#### *4.9.4 Large-scale Exhibitions and the Indian Art*

Having ventured in the global project, India's presence as the potential and emerging market added its presence, firstly within the growing Asian markets and also as an independent entity. This placement of India and its, growing metros as potential nodes on the global network helped make its presence in the art world too. As seen in the third chapter, the possibilities of drawing economic benefits, the increasing Indian diaspora and their financial worth, made one see works of Indian contemporary art in a new light. A near immediate response could be traced with respect to the manner in which Indian art was received in large-scale exhibitions. Therefore, in this section we shall trace how the early, pioneering exhibitions, played a crucial role in paving a way for the latter, which were to inculcate a global character. This is to be understood with the backdrop of not just the growing economy, but also with the consequent rise of Asia in the field of contemporary art. Globalisation and the consequent exhibition of the financial, industrial, intellectual capital from these regions, helped shed the earlier existing, and long-associated notions of

the exotic. Even as postcolonial attempts looked at nullifying or reversing the Orient-Occident model, the global project lay its insistence on defining the contemporary identity.

The act of making and the politics of presenting works of art, is a process which shares crucial dynamics towards the formation of the identity not just of the artists and works, but also with respect to the region of belonging. This holds prominently with respect to large-scale exhibitions. The shows of individual artists, usually have a restrictive range of interpretation, circling around the individual, the personal experiences and influences. With respect to large-scale exhibitions, especially when hosted in a place apart from ones' country, the scope of comparison and grounds of negotiating identities widens drastically. Indian artists had been having a working presence at a global level since long, as seen through the artists of the PAG, and many others. Therefore, it would be totally inappropriate to claim that the same begun with globalisation, yet what needs to be observed is the transition in the manner of looking and reading works of Indian artists after the advent of globalisation. Therefore, we shall begin from the prominent shows that were hosted in India of Indian artists, and then trace the manner of the global receptions.

The early attempts within India, which gave a sense of establishing to Indian artists, could be understood in terms of the efforts from government bodies and also private ones. As mentioned earlier the establishment of the National Gallery of Modern Art and the Lalit Kala Academy (LKA), were significant steps taken by the government, as the post-independence initiatives, in defining the national art. The Triennales organised by the LKA, beginning from its first edition in 1968, further attested the same.<sup>44</sup> These gave opportunities to younger artists to present their works to a wider audience. Though the same was met with protests, nevertheless it has to be credited for aiming to inculcate a tendency towards consolidated efforts, in forming a local story of contemporary Indian art. Along with the same, attempts were made by artists, who played the role of curators, in presenting works of their contemporaries. For example, the exhibition title, *New Contemporaries*, 1978, curated by Gulammohammed Sheikh. *Place for People*, 1981, too was curated

by Geeta Kapur and six artists together. The exhibition aimed at portraying the idea of narratives within Indian art. The catalogue essay had a manifesto-like tone, as it stressed on the belief in narratives focusing on the social and the symbolic. The concept of narration was looked through works of practicing artists of the 1970s, and their interpretation of the local and global, and also the traditional Indian and the western.

A series of other exhibitions like, *Questions and Dialogues*, 1987, at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, by the Kerala Radical Artists and Sculptors Association. The *One Hundred Years of Indian Art*, 1994, from the collection of the NGMA, New Delhi, curated by Geeta Kapur, revalued Indian art, with attempts at identifying Indian modernism, from a non-Western perspective (Horn Please: Narratives in Contemporary Indian Art, 2007, p. 61). Similarly, the year 1997 marked the fifty years of India's independence and therefore provided a juncture to look back and evaluate the past, while simultaneously aiming for a future in the globalised world. By this time the steps towards economic liberalisation were already taken and their impact was palpable. *50 Years of Art in Bombay*, 1997, at NGMA, Mumbai, was curated by Sarayu Doshi; *Indian Contemporary Art – Post-Independence*, was held at Vadehra Art Gallery and the NGMA, Delhi. This was also the year in which Khoj Workshops was founded in Delhi, on the logic of providing an experimental space to artists. In the long-run it would host residencies and set ties with international bodies. In 1998, the British Council sponsored exhibition, *Edge of the Century*, curated by Amit Mukhopadhyay, also aimed at analysing the manner in which Indian art had performed over the decades, and also as it held promising artists, as future practitioners and masters. In 2000, the show titled *Ideas and Images*, NGMA, Mumbai, had a specific focus on the issues related to women in terms of sexual identities and the urban spaces.

Even as Indian artists and curators were striving to define an identity based on their contemporary existence and insistently undertaking a progressive global approach, since the 1980s, it took a bit longer to grant the same cognisance at the international level. In the 1980s, Asia was emerging as a place with newer brand of artists, and with venues which would in the long run, act

as nodal points in the global art network. The international exhibitions focusing on India, like *India – Myth and Reality*, 1982, Oxford, aimed at providing space for post-independence artists from the country. The selection of the artist was not based on specific categories. Then there was *Festival of India*, editions, which in 1986 was held at Centre Grand Pompidou and later in USSR. In 1988, *The Art of Adivasi*, was hosted as a part of the Festival of India, in Tokyo. Just a year later some of the Indian artists were a part of the show *Magiciens de la Terre*, discussed earlier. Overall a tone of the exotic or at least the traditional, still dominated in the reading of works of Indian artists.

The departure from considering India through the orientalist lens and as a decolonised Third World country, and insisting on its independent political, economic status, backed with the intellectual self-recognition, and the certitude of expressing the same, came about in the 1990s. In 1993, an exhibition titled, *A Critical Difference: Contemporary Art from India*, curated by David Thorp, tried to present the works in a manner to prove that contemporary Indian art had a lot to read than the predictable exotic content. The assertion of a postcolonial, independent identity, found an impetus through the framing of its ‘cultural identity’; which again wasn’t based on the borrowed or long-presumed, western views.<sup>45</sup> It had artists like Vivan Sundaram, Nalini Malani, Bhupen Khakhar, etcetera. In 1996, a show which nearly exhibited a globalised tendency was *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions / Tensions*. It took a more region-specific outlook. It could be understood as an attempt to give due cognisance to the now-emerging regions, which in the past had been centres of grand empires. At the same time, it held a tone of independence over that of assertion of the new-identity as rising economies. Regional notions of aesthetics, traditional visual idioms and varied working processes exhibiting an amalgamation of the local and the global, formed a part of the show. Nalini Malani, Sheela Gowda, Bhupen Khakhar, N. N. Rimzon (Figure 4-62), Arpita Singh, R. G. Reddy, the Indian artists, who were a part of the show (Desai, 1996).



Figure 4-62: N. M. Rimzon, *The Inner Voice*, 1993. Fibreglass, Marble dust, iron

1997 marked fifty years of Indian independence and a juncture for analysis. By this time India had made its mark as a pool of intellectual capital, and the potential HNIs and UHNWIs. An exhibition titled, *Tryst with Destiny – Art from Modern India 1947-1997*, presented by the CIMA gallery Kolkata at the Singapore Art Museum. Similarly, India – Celebration of Independence, 1947-1997, was hosted at the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Arts. These two shows had a focus on art coming from the Indian homeland. A large-scale exhibition which had a similar focus on India, but also exhibited a multicultural attitude, by addressing the notion of global dispersal and spread of the new-age globe-trotting artists was, *Out of India: Contemporary Art of the South Asian Diaspora*. This was held at the Queens Museum of Art, New York. Hosting shows of Indian artists, based on a national event of importance in another country was an obvious step proving the escalating importance of the country, and also of contemporary Indian art. The growing Indian diaspora had contributed to various fields, including Indian art. At the same time, it exhibited the growing tendency of the global centres to address, the once marginalised regions, and also an attitude reflecting the grown multicultural tendency.

Apart from the works focusing on the timeline, of the Indian subcontinent, another aspect of growing interest from the global community, as of the intricate fabric of socio-cultural and economic influences which had transformed the country over the past decade. A show hosted in series by the

Tate Modern, London was titled *Century City*, 2001. This show looked at various cities which were of historic importance and were proving their potential as global nodes at the turn of the century. The Indian city which was represented in this show was Mumbai. The exhibition was titled, *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis, Bombay / Mumbai, 1991-2001*. The list of the artists presented in this exhibition was long. Not all were residents of the metropolis, but had presented works keeping Mumbai as a core. Some of the participant artists were, M. F. Husain, Atul Dodiya, Navjot Altaf, Vivan Sundaram, and relatively younger artists like Sudarshan Shetty, Jitish Kallat and Shilpa Gupta too. This show in a way presented a mix of the masters, established artists, and the then promising ones. Another exhibition giving a perspective of India in the postmodern, globalised world, with its growing number of urban centres was *Kapital and Karma, Aktuelle Positionen Indischer Kunst*, at the Kunsthalle Vienna, 2001. These exhibitions had a specific focus on the contemporary practicing artists, most of whom belonged to the metropolitan or urban cities of the country. An exhibition which marked a departure from the same, and took a sweeping view from Fine Arts, to folk and tribal practices was the *Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India*, 2005. Initially held in Perth, Australia, the show travelled to various cities. Relatively similar to *Magiciens de la Terre*, it placed works of tribal folk and contemporary art together; focusing on the notions of economic liberalisation and the political fundamentalism which characterised the period it covered, that is, from 1993 to 2003; further, *Magiciens*, included works of artists from across the world, whereas *Edge of Desire*, looked at Indian artists only. In 2008, *Chalo! India: A New Era of Indian Art*, an exhibition presenting artists from different parts of the country portrayed its position in the new globalised age. The presentation of established artists along with the younger techno savvy artists, attested its position as a progressive country. The title itself translated as, *Let's Go to India*, displayed a need to look at the country by granting it a place of prominence. Further the show was held at the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, hinting that the country, with respect to the art world, was already making a mark globally.

It is important to understand that the aim of mentioning about these shows was not of creating a mere list of the important events, but has to be seen



as an attempt to trace the manner in which the outlook towards Indian art changed over the period. This, as seen, was evident not just in the conceptual outline of the exhibitions but also based on the selection of the artists. Moving from the simple representational stand to those of analytical and critical voices, aiming at locating and defining ones' identity with respect to their national, regional, local or ideological holdings. In a way, providing a sense of freedom, to the 'exhibition maker' and also to the artist. The rising importance of the Asian countries and especially India can be seen not just through the well conceptualised and one-time exhibitions, but also in the exhibitions which had become characteristic of the new global art world.

#### *4.9.5 New Format of Exhibitions and Indian Art*

As mentioned in the third chapter, the art world, started 'looking eastwards'<sup>46</sup> and also at the other largely presumed 'peripheral', since the 1990s. These earlier ignored areas were either on an economic rise, or were potential markets for the conventionally strong centres. Consequently, these spaces started building their own mark as nodes of connectivity within the global networks. Along with the formal exhibitions, the notion of visibility of works of art, artists and the representation of different countries found a totally different connotation, in the 1990s, which itself saw a phenomenal rise in the number of venues for global circulation. These were the biennales, triennials and art fairs. Since the art fairs have been discussed with respect to the art market in the previous chapter, we shall focus on the first two.

Over the period these events have gained gravity and volume and have made a position of significance. Going back to the notion of branding stated in the third chapter, these events have made a near brand name for themselves. Having associations with the public and private enterprise, like the local government bodies, corporate ties and sponsorships, and a wide network of galleries, these have what is now called as an 'ecosystem' of functioning. Unlike the large-scale exhibitions discussed earlier these shows were not a one-time event but were to repeat. Since most of these shows and events were to recur in a stipulated time, permanent boards were formed to monitor their way

and methods of working. These recurring shows provided opportunities for various local galleries to prepare and represent their artists at such global venues. Having an idea of the taste of these events the galleries could present relevant artists. Given the same, even as these events are important for their intrinsic intentions, these have also become major players in the process of establishing networks, between artists, art dealers, collectors, gallerists, critics, curators, cultural officials and various other relevant and related entities (Phaidon Editors & Altshuler, 2013, p. 11).

Another important aspect of these events is that, they gave new places, cities, urban and non-urban spaces, with no necessary tradition of art exhibiting or museum culture,<sup>47</sup> or some specific historical connotation or that of contemporary relevance, to become spaces for hosting such events (Hoffmann, 2014, p. 119). Such that has not been functioning on the conventional hubs on the art maps but have introduced new centres on it. Having its spread over the mentioned private and public enterprises, and national and global entities the viewership for these is also larger than the conventional ones. Of the mentioned types of large-scale shows the biennales, predominantly due to their frequent recurrence, have emerged as a favoured format, to visit, participate or be associated with (Show Time: The 50 Most Influential Exhibitions of Contemporary Art, 2014, p. 11)

Any discussion about the biennales, usually begins with the Venice Biennale, the pioneer which was established in 1895; and proved to be a format for many. Since the 1990s, Asia and some other peripheral countries, witnessed a rise in the number of such recurring exhibitions, which displayed a global taste. The Havana Biennale began in 1986. In 1993, the Asia-Pacific Triennial was launched in Brisbane. With a mix of artists, and countries with varying backgrounds, this provided scope for understanding and conceptualising each edition differently. A similar understanding could be seen with the Johannesburg Biennale, which began in 1995. The major changes came with the establishment of the Gwangju Biennale in 1995, the Shanghai Biennale in 1996 and later Yokohama Triennial in 2001. These spaces evidently were not a part of the global art centres. One of the benefits of their rise, was the increased

visibility of the local artist of these, and other connected regions; and a resultant exchange with the conventional centres of the art world.<sup>48</sup> Each of these aimed at presenting cutting-edge works of art. Interestingly, the regions successfully managed to create centres of local circulation, with a global taste. Given the same, it is during this period, that one sees the need for the western centres to look at the eastern and other regional centres as global contemporaries. This should not be considered as a reversal or inversion of the centre-periphery model, or the dilution of the centre, but certainly attested the rise of regional centres; attesting the plurality of the postmodern global world.

Indian presence in some of these events has been of prominence. Apart from the artists, the curatorial role has been played by some prominent Indian artists and curators. To state a few examples, in 2008, Ranjit Hoskote, co-curated the Gwangju Biennale with Hyunjin Kim. In 2011, he curated the national pavilion, at the Venice Biennale. The pavilion was organised by the Lalit Kala Academy. It was titled, *Everyone Agrees: It's About To Explode*. In the section, he looked at the concept of India as a nation in the fast globalising world. In 2007, Nancy Adajania, was the contributing curator for *Thermocline of Art: New Asian Waves*, ZKM, Karlsruhe, Summer and in 2011, was appointed Joint Artistic Director of the 9th Gwangju Biennale. These were two examples the of curators of a relatively recent period. Similarly, Bose Krishnamachari, curated the first Yinchuan Biennale in 2016. It is interesting to see, that along with the Indian curators, an artist was given an opportunity to curate a biennial. One has to consider that the same given the significant role played by Bose in the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB); an event which placed India on the international pedestal, not as a participant but as a host.

Since in this section we are focusing on the biennales as a new format of recurring exhibitions with respect to Indian contemporary art, it is necessary to discuss the role played by the KMB, both as an exemplar of a global event, and the other, of the way it placed India in the league of global hosts. Like most of the biennales it is based on a private-public effort. The KMB was conceptualised in 2010. To Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu, Kochi seemed like an appropriate space for hosting the event; also having a

cosmopolitan setup, and a presence in history as an influential port. Further this city had never played a role as of the Indian art market or as an exhibiting space. Therefore, it seemed apt to select it, and provide opportunities for individuals from various surrounding regions.



Figure 4-63: Kochi Muziris Biennale, Second Edition, 2014 – Aspinwall House. Artist: Shanthamani Muddaiah, *Backbone*, 2014. Cement and cinder

The first edition of the KMB, itself focused on the notions of cosmopolitanism in the region. The second, 2014 curated by Jitish Kallat, titled *Whorled Explorations*, looked at the city of Kochi, through its historic layers (Figure 4-63). This gave an opportunity for various artists to do site-specific works and to also interact with the local people. The third and the recent one, 2016, *forming in the pupil of an eye*, was curated by another artist, Sudarshan Shetty. The concern of this edition was to explore the very notion of the process of making and receiving works of art. For the next edition to be held in 2018, Anita Dube, has been declared as the curator. KMB, was to provide to the Indian artists, an opportunity in ones' own country, to exhibit with artists of international repute. For example, Sir Anish Kapoor (Figure 4-64), and Ai Weiwei, Angelica Mesiti, Laurent Grasso, Guido van der Werve, Gabriel Lester, and many such artists. At the same time, KMB project was available on the Google Art Program, such that the space could be treaded through, as a virtual tour. This proved beneficial in terms of visibility and also in terms of setting ties with a near monopolistic brand of Google.



Figure 4-64: Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Second Edition, Aspinwall House, 2014. Artist: Anish Kapoor, *Descension*, 2014

According to Bose, since curatorial role has been played by the artists, the participant artists, would experience maximum freedom; backed with the knowledge of physical handling of the space with the conceptual base. Apart from the display of works, the KMB, has talks, discussions, film screenings and various other events, orchestrated around the concurrent them of the edition. With an influx of artists, curators, pedagogues, and various other individuals holding positions of significance in the art, to participate at the KMB, has evidently placed India as a global player. Moreover, the participation of the local students, and those from various other institutions in India, has provided these students an exposure to the global art scene.

#### 4.9.6 *Exhibition Makers*

As we speak of the large-scale exhibitions, especially the biennales, emerging as a favoured format, and the subsequent conversion of entities across the world to venues hosting it, the notion of presenting these works in a crisp manner became of surmounting importance. Thereby, the dynamics of presentation and reception of the works at different venues gained importance. The intent here is not to trace the chronological changes, but to determine the manner or as mentioned in the very beginning of the chapter, the processes, through which the very notion of circulation and reception of the works changed in the contemporary globalised scenario. The mentioned processes helped define the logic based on which the works were presented. As the number of

biennials increased, the need for displaying art too increased in tandem. Since most of these venues aimed at exhibiting artists of repute, similar names were being circulated through these exhibitions; giving rise to what has been called as a 'favoured star list' of artists. Majority of the large-scale shows over the years have been criticised for the same.

With similar artists being circulated, the physical spaces of the exhibitions designed similarly, and with good quality printed catalogues getting published, the fear of repetition, and a predictable quality in the exhibitions, expressed a need for presenting works with a specific perspective; such that the exhibitions would be judged not just for the artists presented, but also the context binding them together. The notion of experiencing the exhibition was given preference. Given which the notion of presenting the works to the viewers, through differing viewpoints, or of presenting them under a cohesive conceptual framework, became mandatory. It is this very notion of contextualisation and re-presentation of art works, be it of varying quality and references, in a cohesive manner, stressed the need of an exhibition maker. These individuals would build a reference point or a predetermined manner in reading the works. These could range from a broad and open span to that of evidently predefined and blinkered look; thereby granting authority and power to these individuals to present the works in a manner found appropriate by them. This very process is characteristic of the role played by a now dominant entity of the contemporary art circulation circuit, the curator, who conjures the exhibitions.

The term curator takes its roots from Latin word *cūrāre* - to care for or *cūrā* – care (Balzer, 2014, pp. 31-32); with roots in medical studies. With respect to art and art-presentation, the role of a curator finds variation, depending on the character, space and the manner of presenting the works. In a conventional sense, the role of the curator was restricted to the museums or large private collections, studying, managing and exploring the collection; such that the works would be considered as entities - taken care of by the curator. Further a relational logic between the taste of the connoisseur / collector, the works themselves, and notions of a comprehensive display, would form the

prime premise of functioning. The strict institutional relation and association would indirectly contribute to the building of a personal relation between the curator, the space / institution, and the works.

The same relation still holds good, with respect to the institutional, conventional spaces; but a diametric difference is observed with respect to the role played by the curators of the contemporary biennales and similar large-scale events. Firstly, one witnesses a departure from the close emotional connect between the works and the curator. As most of the times, different curators are invited to manage every new edition; the changing works and artists and the curators, do not share an emotional bond. Very rarely do specific curators hold a long-term relation or association to any event. The space-and-curator *longue durée*, relation is substituted by the globetrotting, one-time / event presence. This has been seen as the hyper-professional attitude, where most of the curators, work with their teams in an industrious way. Systematic segregation of teams, roles and hierarchies, seem like a near corporatised structure of grouping. For example, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, the Artistic Director of the Documenta 13, 2012, would address her team of curators as ‘agents’, and not curators (Balzer, 2014, p. 7). With well-defined roles, these agents were to follow the instructions of the head curator – the artistic director. A parallel can be drawn between this attitude of curatorial professionalism and the transnational attitude of business; such that ones’ expertise is used as high valued intellectual capital; further the non-location / space specificity and association. Further the curators with their strong networking between galleries, auction houses, buyers and at times artists have emerged as the individuals who are all pervasive and who know it all; emblematic of the need for a networked stability, which too characterised the inculcation of the transnational global attitude.

Noël Carroll, describes what has now become a ‘preferred idiom’ of the globalised art world. With the enhancement of the communication and transportation facilities, to him the transference of information, be of images and works of artists, catalogues, dealing contracts, payment methods, knowledge of opportunities, and the subsequent building of networked



functioning characterises the contemporary scene. This circuitry to him is controlled by the curators, who live a nomadic life and are in constant search of artists with a similar lifestyle. One can say that the curator gets the status of success, through the conceptual contributions to the exhibitions and also by being present everywhere; the ubiquity, as Carroll states is similar to the rising frequent-flier status, again emblematic of a de-territorialised, transnational individual (Art and Globalization: Then and Now, 2007, p. 138). Though not a blanket statement but most of the times the touch and fly attitude of selecting artists dominates, the process of 'researching' for new talent. The curators tend to float around the globe at a phenomenal rate, with the aim of selecting artists most of the times based on cursory online research; again, bringing us back to the notion of virtual visibility, as an absolute necessity to be recognised as an active professional.

With most of the curators across the globe, being invited to structure the editions of the respective exhibitions, their varied conceptual structuring grants a different taste to these events. As their individual understanding of the space, works, their conceptual framework, and predictions of the visitors, affects the taste of the event. Given the same, the earlier posed problem of sameness born out of the similar list of exhibiting artists circulating in the shows, gets dissolved. In each event, the need for a 'make different' attitude, marks a departure from the predictable. With the curatorial control these individuals have played a significant role in multiple ways, from selecting artists and works to reading, and thematically projecting them. The term curator was not largely used in India until recent. Earlier artists or writers working in close association would show their works, as simple exhibition facilitators. Then the role of the critic was of surmounting importance. The critic would be the one who with a scholarly approach would read works of artists considering their placement in the contemporary practices and also within their individual trajectories. The globalised art world has seen a diluting role of the critic, and the rising role of the curator.

James Elkins in his book titled, *What Happened to Art Criticism?*, reads the various factors that have contributed to the change and also suggests a near-

remedial process. His works by undertaking a structured segregation, between, academic writing, newspaper writing for the masses, the catalogue contributions, and the newer media, tries to trace the concept of criticism to the same. According to Elkins, the contemporary criticism has been losing its character of judgement and has been adopting a more descriptive tone (Elkins, 2003, pp. 2-9). This could be a result of the varied background from which the critics come; for example, the newspaper art critical writing, which earlier held significance for the readers. This still holds valid for the regional and vernacular newspapers, which still have art critics writing regularly, and focus on artists with whom the masses can relate. At the same time, one cannot ignore the growing opacity of the art practices, with the absorption of the increasing number of new media, performances, etcetera. The contemporary works, aiming for novelty, non-retinality and also at creating an impact of shock, have brought about a sense of unknowability for the audience. An inclusion of such works in the newspapers doesn't seem appropriate, as the readership would be low. Further, the responsibility of informing or educating the masses about the new practices seems tricky; especially with some practices aiming for shock, and at times a grotesque impact.

At this juncture, one has to take into consideration, the notion of readership. Over the past few decades, the readership for art criticism, has been reduced to those of art magazine readers; which sustain on the advertisements.<sup>49</sup> Elkins, brings another financial perspective to this matter, by saying that rarely any art critic, unlike the curators can make a living by only focusing on criticism. Majority of the times, only a part of their duty in the print media is to cover art.

To Elkins the contemporary art writing, lacking a critical dialogue, exhibits an amorphous nature, under the pretext of accommodating plurality. The catalogue writings usually take a near laudatory tone, to avoid any form of negative impression about the show; as it is funded by the gallerists. The dominance of the literary impressiveness, tends to sabotage the content, to present an overall impressive essay. In a way, this marks a popular tone, where the judgement holds less value, over the descriptive detailing. Elkins provides

a remedial approach, by stating the necessity of art criticism, as a practice to build on a judgement based approach. This certainly is not of an opinionated character, but at least where the stand of the writer is clear. At the same time stressing on the need for drawing relevance of the artworks and the writings to art historical methodologies, thereby making it useful for the masses and the academicians. To Elkins, the success of a critical piece could be gauged, if it is worth mentioning in any academic writing as a reference. At the same time, he notes that the lack of large number of Art History departments offering courses in Art Criticism, is one of the reasons for art criticism to not have a grounding home space (What Happened to Art Criticism, 2003). This is exactly opposite to the rising number of curatorial courses. The popularity of these new courses, has resulted in the rising number and importance of the curators, in the globalised art scene. These 'exhibition makers' have gained a status of de-territorialised, context makers, especially for the large-scale exhibitions. Usually working with their teams, in a near industrious manner. Further the intervention by the curators towards the conceptual structuring nearly give them an authorial status.

This is similar to the curatorial write-ups, which present the works, in the present contexts for large-scale exhibitions. The curator is looked upon not just as an exhibition maker, conceptualiser but also as a 'taste defining' entity. Here one is reminded of Jameson, who draws a relation between influences of capitalism and the cultural transformations, and highlights the notion of production, not just of man-made products but also of 'taste' (Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, 1991). Given the different backgrounds of the respective curators, the need to portray a progressive, at times a non-conformist, radical stand, and the inculcation of the 'spectacle creation' characteristic of the large-scale shows, the subjectivities of the curators, takes a prominent position.<sup>50</sup> Along with the freedom of contextualisation of the works, some of the interventionist stands taken by the curators have been looked upon critically as interference with the original intent of the artists. This can be seen through the work of Marina Abramovic. In 2010, the artist made a video, describing the famed curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, popularly known as HUO, in twenty words. The video began with Abramovic holding a paper on which was

printed, 'THE CURATOR IS PRESENT THE ARTIST IS ABSENT' (Balzer, 2014, p. 25).<sup>51</sup> This clearly states the sabotaging of the artworks, though the intervention, and the interpretations presented by the curators of the works, over the intent of the artist.

Further the dominance of the curatorial act over that of the original concept backing the works of art, and at times the identity of the artists, for whom the notion of identity and its convenient moulding is has also been of concern. Yinka Shonibare, is a London based artists, whose work deals with the exploration of colonialism and post-colonialism within the contemporary context of globalization (Yinka Shonibare MBE (RA), n.d.). In a roundtable discussion on *Global tendencies: Globalism and the large-scale exhibition*, mentioned that,

I have been extremely concerned by the proliferation of and a curatorial tendency toward a neo-nineteenth-century "discovery" of the new and foreign artist. The over traveled curator brings back a "discovered" foreign artist, who is in fact already known in his or her own country; and that foreign artist today likely already has a sense of the global, even while staying physically at home. The artist working in Delhi or South Africa can no longer fulfill an exotic desire, but they can surely construct one. A two-way exchange would be truly global and by far more productive. (Griffin T. , 2003)

This gives an understanding of the inclination and intention of the curators while selecting the artists for the large-scale shows. The curatorial autonomy then takes, the earlier mentioned authorial role, such that the curated exhibition is looked upon as an artwork by itself. This is also true with insisting the presence of ones' identity in the works. William Pope L, an African American artist reacted to some critics who set a connection of his work *My Niagra* to the African *bocio* figures, by stating that,

How come all these white people know more about black folk than I do? In fact, how come one of them knows more about

me than I do? ... Why is it not enough that I am a black American artist? Apparently I need to get blacker. More authentic. I must become the black American artist with dark, mysterious, atavistic roots in some primitive Otherness. Who is speaking here? Who is telling me this? (William Pope L. - Portfolio)

As a diaspora artist, William ridicules the reading of the work as one with colour.

Globalisation has certainly provided numerous opportunities and increasing visibility for artists beyond geographic territories. At the same time, the notions of multiculturalism, which dominate the contemporary scene, have provided space for heterogeneity. The same can be read in the way it is translated in the large-scale exhibitions. At times, it provides a balanced array, and on the other extreme, the accent on inclusiveness lends to the exhibitions being overstuffed (Winking, 2012, pp. 622-625); as attempted to accommodate as much possible. At the same time, considering the differing backgrounds of the curators and the artists, the concern remains of how are the country or region-specific works being read. Given which, the question of the 'local' still dominates. As Jonathan Harris in the introduction to an issue of the Third Text, focusing on globalisation and contemporary art, states that the contemporary character of global art is defined through the large-scale shows where the presence and the power of the curator ranks supreme. The globe-trotters aim at finding issues to address, such that one of the dominant questions, in the 'globalised' field, still adheres to the ambiguities of the geographic tropes, as to 'where does global/ised art come from? (Harris, 2013)'; and can be carried further to ask, as to, how does it get read?