

CHAPTER - X

CONCLUSION

In this study we have made an attempt to trace the development of Art in Western India covering a period of about 100 years from ~~the~~ second half of the 19th century. In a phenomenon of this kind there cannot be a conclusion, because we are dealing with a continuous process^s. Still I would like to highlight a few points. I have divided this study into sections according to the changes in the art styles. The periods covering these overlap because we cannot definitely draw the line of demarkation between the time span of one style from that of the next. The chart attached here^s with will clarify the period covered by ~~the~~ different art styles, the names of painters related to the particular style of art as well as the tendencies expressed by the particular generations of artists. It also mentions the qualities which were common amongst the groups. It thus elucidates the definite logical link between all these groups in the sense that each borrows some stylistic qualities from the earlier one and contributes some new characteristics, which are passed on to the next generation. Thus this evolution of the art styles has followed a more or less logical sequence in the long laborious process.

Some critics may raise objection to the use of the word 'logical' in the context of the view point that art cannot be a result of a mathematical calculation in order to arrive at a

logical result. It is also generally accepted that the art style cannot be subjected to any hard and fast rules because its emergence is guided by emotions; and emotions cannot be controlled by any outside process. However, I may point out here that the word 'logical' is used here in the sense that in particular situations a human mind is bound to react. Though we cannot definitely calculate in which way it will react, though it may differ slightly in its reaction. Nevertheless we can assure one thing, that this reaction will be most often diverse in character to that of the prevalent type. It may be pointed out here that the rise of various 'Isms' in the European art-styles originated from the similar logic and it has proved the existence of such a logical sequence of the tendencies arising from particular given situations. This process may vary slightly due to the particular situation of the country or the environment but the change may not be too drastic.

The process of the development in art that we have dealt with ~~has~~ started in Western India and particularly at Bombay with the Realistic style influenced by the British academic methods. It came into existence as a result of the art/education based on the ideals of the Royal Academy, London. This art style had a peculiar combination of realism and idealism. We have named it ~~as the~~ Romantic-realism due to the fact that the choice of the themes was mainly related to the romantic stories from Hindu mythology and history. It was from this point onward that the unfolding of art manifestation began and after passing through various phases like the style of open-air school, the interlude of Indian ^d Decorative

style, the style of the Indore School, the style of the Progressive Artists' Group and that of the Bombay Group, it entered the abstract phase. Gulam Mohammed Sheikh has called this line of progress from Impressionism to the (Non-figurative) Abstraction, a 'Vertical movement' by which a gradual reduction of the visual data reached its logical climax. To my mind it will be more justified to call it a spiral movement because it suggests a rising oscillation though every time it is at the same distance from the central apex which is the indigenous aspect. That is the reason why a painter tries to look back at his own roots and make judgements by introspection.

From the beginning of the progression up to the point during the seventies, the development was influenced by various cross-currents at different stages and these were responsible ⁱⁿ to bringing in new factors. In addition to the social change brought by the Industrial revolution, outbreak of the World Wars etc. I may mention here for example the revivalism initiated by E.B. Havell which was put into practice by the Tagores. This had its repercussions on Western India also and paved the way for the phase of Indian Interlude. Other significant influence was that of the active interest taken by certain foreigners like Rudy van Lyden, Walter Langhammer and E. Schlesinger. They brought about the awareness regarding contemporary European art trends amongst the young painters of the Progressive Group. The third and equally important influence was that of Amrita Sher Gil. By a clever

synthesis of Western technique and indégenous elements she painted the themes from Indian life in a very lively manner. Her sympathy for the Indian people and specially for the women imparted a touch of melancholy to the figures in her paintings. One can feel that the people represented in her paintings have Indianness in their character as well as in their expression of suffering. Amrita is sometimes criticised for absorbing influences from 'Post-Impressionism', which had become out-dated, instead of 'Expressionism' which was ^a more contemporary movement in Europe at that time. It is obvious that the style of Amrita Sher Gil's paintings is so much related to that of Gauguin. However, it is undoubtedly true that in her paintings a profound sense of modernity is discernable.

Opinions differ about the exact meaning of the term 'Modernity' in art. For example, Paritosh Sen has written in one of his articles that Modern Art began, when the execution took the place of rendering and it aimed at a reversal of the old subject picture relationship and everything else in the painting was subdued to the artist's style.² If this is taken as a norm for modernism then we find the first appearance of this factor in the painting of the Indore artists. It was in their works that the appeal for the theme became subsidiary and the execution played the dominant role. Here it is worth mentioning that in Bendre's painting 'Vagabond' he proved that a powerful colouring can reduce the drawing to the level of a subsidiary aspect. It was in a way repudiation of the standards set by the realistic

painters according to whom drawing was of highest importance. It reminds the similar controversy in Europe between the Rubenists and the Poussinists or another of the same type between the Florentine painters and the Venetian painters.³

It is surprising that during the period of tension as a result of the World Wars and also during the struggle for Indian freedom, the painters of Western India remained comparatively passive. The reaction against the foreign rule was not forcefully expressed through their paintings. But such a reaction was much more forceful in the literary field. The Marathi writers produced novels, plays as well as stimulating poems in this period. The only nationalist aspect expressed by some of the artists was when they began painting in the Indian ^dDecorative style. There are others who think that it was the Progressive Group of artists who brought modernism to Bombay. It is true that the Progressive Group initiated a radical change and expressed strongly their revolt against the tradition. Their expression was both shocking as well as thought provoking. The whole aim of the Progressive painters was to bring about a change and progress, which they tried to do by rejecting the past tradition, as well as the alien realism.

The question arises here whether modernity is connected to this idea of progress based on change. It is true that in any process if it does not have change it will become stagnant. The same is true about the development of art and the very word

development implies the aspect of progress by change. But is every change progressive in character? The change also should have some significance. It should take place according to its suitability to the changing surroundings. Thus it should serve the needs of the time and be relevant to the environment. Only such type of change will bring progress, otherwise it will be gimmicky or become only a part of the scheme to present something new.

The change brought about by the Progressive Group came at appropriate time. Because, on one side the Indian ^dDecorative style, which had been introduced by Ahiwasi had lost its lively character and was becoming stereotyped. An increasing number of painters who were painting in the same manner reduced it to a cliché. On the other hand though the Indore painters introduced a new way of rendering the effect of bright sunlight, the aspects of old realism were still lingering. Progressive^s thus discarded both and in a way paved the way for a new kind of presentation of the theme. However, unfortunately ~~and~~ the ideas which they expressed in their manifesto, they could not put into practice. There was a contradiction^s in their thinking and their actual paintings. In their manifesto they expressed their intention to bring 'a closer understanding and contact between different sections of the artists' community and the people.'³⁴ However, they soon realised that it was impossible and so limited their pursuits to formal elements in painting. Souza sincerely thinks that there was no serious art in India before the rise of the Progressive artists and they were the first modernists in India. However, as Geeta Kapur points out 'the concept of modernity was accepted by

them at the simplest and most obvious level and the dilemma^w of their own identity was lying within it'.⁵ In the strong urge for that quest, they subordinated every thing else and even the past tradition of India without considering its significance. Perhaps as G.M. Sheikh has noted, 'there was no need to ignore the past totally or to condemn it. "The tradition with its broader base of communication with the society could have strengthened the movement instead of becoming an obstruction".⁶ But the Progressives could not catch the proper spirit of past tradition of India. (The individual members perhaps became aware of it after the ~~dissemination~~^{dispersal} of the group). Their spokesman, Souza, underestimated Amrita Sher Gil by saying that she was 'a hybrid derived from Gauguin' and that George Keyt was a hybrid 'biologically' - because he was a Burgher by birth from Ceylon (Burghers had Dutch and Sinhalese blood in them) and because he was much influenced by Picasso.⁷ This clearly shows that they could not grasp the significance of either Amrita or George Keyt. On one side they were talking about bringing the art closer to the people and on the other they were trying to ignore the roots of the very life of the Indian people.

The manifesto of the Progressive painters showed a striking similarity to the 'Die-Bruke'^c, a group of the German Expressionists. The name 'Progressive' was adopted due to the influence of the Communist Party and the Pragatishil Lekhak Sangh in Calcutta. The Progressives began well with painting the subjects related to the lower classes in the society viz., Ara's paintings on prostitutes, labourers, gamblers and Husain's paintings based on the rural life etc. However, it soon became clear that their

emphasis was more on the change in technique and style rather than the content of the painting. Perhaps they themselves became aware of this contradiction in their pictorial aims and their style. Thus in the catalogue of 1949 exhibition they admitted their failure and directed their search towards the formal elements of art. After their exhibition the group split due to the departure of three of its prominent painters to Europe. In spite of this, the very contradiction between their aims and in their actual paintings would have definitely brought the split sooner or later.

The real contribution of the Progressive Painters lies in the fact that they made the Indian artists aware of the contemporary European trends, of German Expressionism and aroused their curiosity about the related happenings in the European Art scene. Secondly, they have the credit to put a stop to the imitative tendencies of the realistic style and Indian ^dDecorative style paintings prevailing during that period. Their paintings created an urge for introspection amongst the painters (on this matter P.T. Reddy's attempts should be mentioned as significant though his group was short-lived). The amount of support which the Progressives received from the critics like Rudy Van^o Leyden and others and also from the press helped to focus the attention of artists as well as art-lovers on them.⁸

Compared to them the painters of the Bombay Group proved to be more restrained in their approach. Though all of them started from the academic style, and though they became proficient in it, they discarded it and turned towards the study of Indian

traditional painting styles and especially Jain miniatures. From it they evolved their own vocabulary. Some members like Chavda and Hebber had the advantage of the art training in Europe, which provided a sound basis for colour application and rendering the human structure. Their formal arrangements too were more deliberate. To a certain extent they displayed an introspective quality and some indigenous elements either in their pictorial style or in their concept.

Out of the members of this group Samant and Gaitonde soon left India and established their own place in the art world of Europe. D.G. Kulkarni, Baburao Sadwelkar and S.B. Palsikar stopped exhibiting their works whereas Ara, Hebber and Chavda continued. Ara has not changed his style much, but the other two have continued exhibiting regularly. Chavda has evolved an abstract style based on lyrical forms. Hebber's involvement in painting suggests a greater awareness about the contemporary world and the happenings in the environment. However, human figure is the main concern in his painting. He adjusts his style according to the needs of the subject. His recent series on 'Energy' in a markedly abstract style proved that he is capable of expressing the purity of forms. The painters and sculptors discussed in the Chapter on 'Independent artists' also show this particular awareness of the contemporary world and the quality of introspection. They have expressed their search for the universal truth concerning the life of human being and his position in the contemporary world.

The contribution of the Baroda School in the emergence of a number of creative painters and sculptors, needs special mention. As pointed out earlier it has proved the potentiality of a right kind of art ^{and} teaching/work ~~and~~ atmosphere. I am emphasizing it here because in Bombay the condition was quite the contrary. Though J.J. School of Art contributed in earlier periods by its art education, but in the post-independence period the main art-activity has taken place outside it rather than conditioned within its compound.

The question about 'Indigenous element' has come to forefront especially after the 60's. The artists as well as art/lovers have become conscious about this element in the Indian paintings. This may be perhaps due to different reasons. The most important of all is that as the Indian painter is not working and exhibiting in India only but he also seeks to establish his identity at the world level. The boundaries between the nations have lost their importance as far as the art world is concerned and the advanced means of communication make it possible for the artists to have contact with the art activities abroad. The artist now is invited to exhibit or deliver lectures on art abroad. He is exhibiting along with his western counterparts in the group shows. With all this the outlook of the foreigners towards the contemporary Indian art phenomenon is also changing. A foreigner whether he may be a critic or connoisseur and patron, tries to look for some Indianness in the contemporary paintings and sculptures of India. And his norms of Indianness are most of the times superfluous and

based on only visual symbols or rhythmic line etc. whereas often he is not much acquainted with the Indian philosophy or ways of thinking. An artist who wants to make his painting saleable most often is in danger of using these outward signs in his paintings to attract a foreign customer.

It is very interesting to observe that the Indian artists who have settled abroad in prominent cities of Europe, are now turning for reference to one or other element of Indian art and philosophy. Some have used Tantra symbols in their paintings, some are using its calligraphy, some are making use of Indian rhythmic figures, or Gods and Goddesses, some adopt certain aspects of miniature painting and so on. It is very surprising that Souza who revolted against past tradition and introduced violent distortion in his imagery is falling back now on mythological themes. There are very few painters in whose paintings such indigenous feeling comes spontaneously because they live their life as Indians and have no inhibitions about it. Those who use it superficially without having the awareness of the concepts, though are commercially successful but lack that feeling because in their pictures the Indian motives far from gaining significance as a symbol, remain only as a sign.

Geeta Kapur in her ⁱⁿQuest ^{of} ~~for~~ identity' has brought out few aspects concerning the indigenous element very significantly "Indigenism is most fruitful when its aims are a self-directed questioning. But often it becomes a means by which newly independent people defend themselves from being assimilated by the more

advanced nations". This takes various forms of expression ranging from the distortion of Western materialism upto all sorts of ideas emerged from the historical superiority. She also suggests further that this search for identity through the revaluation of the past will revitalise our own culture. By the help of introspection the artist should discover, firstly the essence of culture by an understanding of its unique tradition and its present characteristic manifestations "and secondly, he should become authentic and self-^aware by stripping out the masks put on in deference against a confused and frightening colonial history and the masks that hide failures and deceptions of the post-colonial era as well".⁹

The artists in 60's of the Western India have definitely shown signs in this direction by the character their art styles display which are varied as well as multi-dimensional. The process will go on as long as the human will persists.

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ABBREVIATIONS:- LKA = Lalit Kala Akademy, New Delhi.

CIAS = Contemporary Indian Art Series
published by LKA.

LKC = Lalit Kala Contemporary published by
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