

## CHAPTER - VI

### PROGRESSIVE ARTISTS' GROUP (1947-1953)

#### (EXPRESSIONIST PHASE)

The Art-world of Bombay was influenced by several factors working simultaneously around 1940. The spirit of revolt which emerged due to the movement for freedom of India, was the main factor. It was more conspicuous in the field of literature and Poetry, of India. Another equally important factors were the effects of the two world wars and the 'Industrial Revolution'. These resulted into the spread of socialist ideas rapidly. The Royalists were condemned and the 'Common Man' became an important factor in social as well as political and literary fields. 'The Pragatishil Lekhak Sangh' was established in Calcutta. 'Man is Supreme and there is none above him' was the slogan given by the 'Calcutta Group' formed by the Painters of Bengal in 1943. In Marathi literature, it was for the first time that a labourer was made a hero of the novels and the plays. This was more clearly seen in the Marathi Plays of the eminent writer Mama Varerker. In Marathi poetry poets Kusumagraj and Anil gave the slogan of Revolution. The poem 'Garya Jayjaykar Kranticha' was sung popularly everywhere. With the Industrial Revolution and the subsequently rising importance of the common man, new problems arose due to his poverty, hardwork and the undue advantage of his work taken by the factory owners. These naturally reflect in the literary as well as the art field. The painters of the Calcutta Group or the Progressive Group recognised the importance of the

activity. The painters of the Calcutta Group and so also the Progressive Group recognised the importance of the human being as well as the significance of certain new trends in European art. Even before the formation of Calcutta Group, in Bombay P.T. Reddy had formed the 'Young Turks' Group in 1940, which included besides himself, A.A. Majid, Bhopale, Clement Baptista and M.Y. Kulkarni. Their works reflected the similar revolutionary urges.

In Bombay the leftist philosophy attracted the young painters who became increasingly aware <sup>of</sup> about the miseries and sufferings of the lower classes. In addition to this the painters who afterwards formed the Progressive Artists' Group had some resentment against the existing administration of the Bombay Art Society and its authorities. All these factors resulted into the formation of the Group which was responsible for the rise of a new art-style in which preference was given to distorted forms filled with bright pure colour-schemes in striking contrast which were applied with vigorous brush work. Thus the art-world of Bombay witnessed the emergence of a new pictorial style through the exhibition of the paintings by the Progressive Artists' group in 1949. This group included the painters K.H. Ara, S.H. Raza, M.F. Hussain, Newton Souza, H.A. Gade and S.K. Bakre - the sculptor. Their common grievances against the so-called authorities in the art field of Bombay and their keen desire to introduce some totally new elements of style in their art expression had brought them together.

Though the first exhibition of this group was held in 1949, the group actually came formally into existence as early as in 1947, in a meeting held on December 15, 1947.<sup>1</sup> This meeting was called to

discuss the current exhibitions of the Bombay Art Society. The persons who spoke were Souza, Raza, Ara, Bakre, Bharatan and the critic Rashid Hussain. The other painters like V.A.Mali, Sharad and Anand Samar Akine (a Ceylonese Artist) were also present. The speakers expressed their utter disappointment with the judging of the Bombay Art Society and unanimously arrived at the following conclusions that there was a (i) lack of principle on which exhibits were accepted in the exhibition by the Society, that (ii) the judging committee should be an elected body and (iii) should be able to justify its choice of exhibits logically on art values before the public and (iv) inspite of the process of selection some disappointing exhibits were hung while many progressive and remarkable paintings like Ara's 'Independence<sup>Day</sup> Procession' were left out. Rashid Hussain criticised the old orthodox critics and started the necessity of the artists taking initiative in developing a conscious art-patronage among the masses with deliberate social purpose in their art. Newton exhorted that artists should get together to thrash out common problems and thus help the development of a new national art. Raza criticised ~~on~~ the poor and disappointing standard of the exhibits of Bombay Art Society's annual show. Ara demanded that the artist should have freedom (he used the word - 'swatantrata') for his expression and should overthrow the living corpse of the worshippers of false values in Art. Bakre and Mali agreed with the criticism on the exhibits.

The 'Progressive Artists' Group' had already been formed before this meeting, when the members - Ara, Raza, Souza and Bakre had decided to exhibit their works together. The Group had an anti-imperialist outlook and the aim of 'bridging the widening gulf between the artists and the life of the people' (which sounded like the

manifesto of the 'Die-Bücke' <sup>like</sup> the German Expressionists).<sup>2</sup> To the original <sup>strength of</sup> four members, two more were added afterwards. Hussain was <sup>persuaded</sup> by Newton Souza and Gade was brought into the fold of the group by Raza. Bakre who had been convinced by Ara, was already in the Group. So now the number rose to six. They decided to limit the number of six to avoid stylistic scramble. The title "Progressive" was inspired probably from the <sup>P</sup>rogressive Writers' movement which was started by the communist writers and the fellow travellers in the 1930's.

Before analysing the role performed by the 'Progressive <sup>Group</sup> Paint-ers', it will be proper to know something about their <sup>lives</sup> ~~life~~ and their background which led them to take such a bold and revolutionary step.

K.H. Ara was born in 1914 in Penury (Hyderabad) and first came to Bombay with his grandfather at the age of seven. From ~~as~~ humble beginning as a dressing boy to Col. and Mrs. Young at Government House, he did different types of jobs and finally was working <sup>ed</sup> as a cleaner in a local Japanese firm. At this time he started painting ~~in~~ <sup>at</sup> this leisure hours and sent these to the art exhibitions and surprisingly won prizes also. Walter Langhammer, the then art director of The Times of India and Rudy Van Leyden, the critic, noticed his talent and encouraged him. Under their guidance, Ara blossomed into a painter. To be more exact, Ara was the 'find' of Leyden, who recognised the talent and dynamic naïve quality in Ara's paintings, when in 1939, Ara won the Times of India Prize No.2. In 1941, his 'Flora Fountain' was admired and won the

Topiwala Desai Prize.<sup>3</sup> The critic remarked, "A happy surprise in K.H. Ara's 'Flora Fountain'<sup>which</sup> is brightly coloured, busy and alive. It has naive qualities of paintings in Pre-Vinci France. A better knowledge and some encouragement will surely produce notable work from his creative talent". Leyden saw in his careless dashes of paint and in his crude drawing, something that had the quality of genius. Hereafter Leyden encouraged him to paint and insisted that he take a few elementary lessons. With great courage, Ara struggled to pursue his job as well as to spend more hours in painting. His one-man show in 1942 consisted of both oils and water colours.<sup>4</sup> His painting<sup>technique</sup> showed spontaneity. His subjects included flowers, trees, forts, roads, arches, highways, bridges, field-bathers etc. The water colours were nearly all still-lives - wineglasses, grapes, pineapples and earthen pots. Undoubtedly his water colours were far superior than his oil ~~colours~~<sup>paintings</sup>. It was ~~most~~<sup>quite</sup> natural that he found the water colour as the most suitable medium for ~~him~~ as it was cheaper than oil colours and very small quantity of colour could give ~~when added more water~~ more quantity of transparent colour when water was added to it. The colours schemes which he used were bright which expressed a dynamic force ~~that~~ which we associate with in the paintings of naive or folk artists. The critic of Bombay Chronicle remarked about his paintings in the Bombay Art Society's annual show in 1942 "K.H. Ara is conspicuous in the oil section" ~~by~~ by a fine impression, "Village Fish Market" ~~and~~ "K.H. Ara is again conspicuous in watercolour section by his two exhibits "Napean View" and in "Rani Baug".<sup>5</sup>

Ara came into limelight when he won the Governor's Prize at the Bombay Art Society's exhibition. Ara came from a very poor family and had to struggle a lot for his own maintenance in Bombay. Naturally he had a deep sympathy for the poor and suppressed class. In 1948, after Indian independence, he painted a huge canvas of 3' x 2' x 18', depicting the subject "Bombay's Mammoth Procession of Independence Day", which he tried to represent historically as faithfully as possible. He <sup>depicted</sup> ~~showed~~ the background of Oval Maidan packed with people after the gun-salute ceremony. It took 13 days for him to paint it. He sent the picture to the Bombay Art Society's annual exhibition and though it was approved by the prominent members of the Art Society, including the Honorary Secretary V.V. Oak and the eminent critic R.V. Leyden, the judging committee rejected it. Naturally Ara was much upset and even angry. Leyden had openly admired the painting <sup>in these words</sup> ~~as~~ "The painting is spontaneous and at the same time full and complete. In it Ara, the artist, Ara, the poet and citizen have merged and co-operated". It was quite natural that Ara should go against the prescribed standards of art and <sup>wish</sup> ~~want~~ to take some revolutionary step, which would shock the authorities. Thus Ara had a reason sufficient enough to revolt.

As for Francis Newton Souza, we find that he was all the while <sup>some kind of</sup> ~~bearing the~~ inner struggle <sup>was going on</sup> in his mind. He was born in April 1924 in Goa in a Roman Catholic family. His father <sup>had</sup> died when he was only three months old and soon his only little sister also expired. From the time when Souza later on came to know about these happen-  
ing, he was bearing a 'curious feeling of an ancient guilt' ~~that~~ <sup>as if</sup>

he had inadvertently killed his father. Naturally Souza fancied "that image of Oedipus shot through with tragic irony" as Geeta Kapur puts it.<sup>6</sup> Francis Newton Souza was taken to Bombay by his mother after the death of her husband. In Bombay, his mother did a job as a dress-maker, in the Institute of Needle-Craft and Domestic Science. Souza was put in the St. Xavier's High School. But he could not complete his education there and when he was in the high school, he was expelled from the school due to his scribbling of pornographic drawings on the walls of the school lavatories. He joined Sir J.J. School of Art in 1940, where in those days a curriculum based on the British model, made the students study from nude models and plaster casts of the Roman copies of the Greek sculptures. Portraiture and landscape painting was also given importance. A special Indian section for the training of traditional Indian Decorative Style was also provided. The entire teaching programme aimed at giving the young artist a ~~prepared~~ sound basis of realistic approach and craftsmanship. Souza proved his talent by winning prizes in the art school exhibition. However, he was not fully <sup>with his achievements</sup> satisfied but due to his <sup>overt</sup> patriotism, he was expelled from the Art School. Souza then joined the communist Party. His paintings in this period expressed the ideals related <sup>in</sup> to communist philosophy e.g. 'Goan Peasants', 'Bombay Proletariat', 'The Capitalists' were painted as 'Villains'. All these paintings were admired in the Communist party journal. Souza's ~~inclination~~ <sup>such that he could</sup> nature was not remain attached to anything for a long time and he therefore soon left the Communist party ~~too~~, for some unbelievable reasons. In his

whole life, Souza seems to like to play the role of a dissatisfied soul, ~~who was~~ blaming the whole<sup>e</sup> world and taking it for granted that the whole world ~~was~~<sup>is</sup> against him. This may be because of the bitterness which came through his personal suffering. Naturally he developed into an iconoclast who wanted to destroy everything that was considered good and moral according to the so-called high-brows. However, he tried to give a broad ideological orientation to his intentions. Thus, it was quite natural on his part to form a group to engage in some shocking activities, that would attract the attention of the art-world and at the same time shatter<sup>ideas of</sup> the so-called high-brows and critics. It was Souza who did the whole job of working out a manifesto in which he expressed his own ideas and stated that 'they wanted to take art away from the sophisticated arty-arty crowd'.<sup>7</sup> Souza<sup>a</sup> had considerable admiration for Ara's calibre as a painter, whose work he found "stunning because of its direct, intuitive modernism". It was Souza who first recognized Husain's talent. <sup>Husain's</sup> whose painting, showed qualities different from the other artists and <sup>who</sup> was persuaded by Souza to join the Progressive Group. Souza was <sup>also</sup> a good writer ~~too~~ with a powerful ~~expressive~~ language. Naturally, he became the spokesman of the Progressive Group.

Said Hyder Raza was born at Bawaria in Madhya Pradesh in the year 1922. He had his early art training at Nagpur School of Art. Raza toured widely all over India. He was mainly interested in landscapes. His Nasik landscapes<sup>8</sup> gave him the opportunity to get the honour of winning the first scholarship offered by Art Society of India for a tour for landscape painting. Raza was fascinated



by the bold impastos of Langhammer as well as the simplicity and pleasant colour schemes of Bendre. His water colour landscapes in the Bombay Art Society's annual exhibition in the year 1944, depicting the Bombay scenes were admired as 'delightful' which included A village hut (16), Fort Market (No.15), Ambewadi (No.22), Sir Phirozshah Mehta Road (No.23), at Chembur (No.24). Out of these, his painting on Phirozshah Mehta Road was awarded a silver medal for the best watercolour. This painting was in opaque watercolour which was popularized by Bendre and Solegaonkar, whereas the treatment of the subject and broad execution as well as the bird's eye view, showed the influence of Walter Langhammer. Next year he got the 'Late Narayan Anant Desai Topiwala Memorial Prize No.1' for his 'Street Scene, Udaipur' in water colour.<sup>9</sup> Raza's water colours were admired by the critic as 'juicier' and 'delightful'. Raza's warm colour schemes were sophisticated. The critic remarked, "Raza, who sticks to his own clear and transparent water colour style, of which we saw a very good example not so long ago. His present set of landscapes and town scene is very likeable indeed although he too tries to 'out-Bendre' Bendre. Here is a new talent worth watching".<sup>10</sup> In 1946, in the annual exhibition of the Bombay Art Society, Raza once again won the Silver Medal for the best water colour and the critic Rudy<sup>Van</sup> Leyden admired him as the, "Strongest talent in the water colour section" and that "his street scenes of Bombay are excellent especially No.151, with a sulphurous sky which betrays an unusual sense of colour".<sup>11</sup> Raza's sophisticated and extremely pleasant colour scheme and spontaneity in execution made his paintings immensely popular. In the year 1946, his landscapes from Banaras and especially the

painting 'The Dasasvamedh Ghat' (which won silver medal) were similarly appreciated as Raza 'stands out as the surest and most sensitive painter of landscapes in the whole exhibition'. Early paintings of Raza showed more influence of Bendre, however, later on Langhammer's influence became dominating. Langhammer's rapid and spontaneous handling or broad brush strokes, his exceptionally bright colour schemes and wide range of hues, influenced him considerably, which was clearly seen in his prize winning painting 'Bori-Bunder' (Sir Chintaman D. Deshmukh's Prize). Mrs. Langhammer in her review write, 'S.H. Raza's Bori-Bunder is an excellent example of his fluent technique and tasteful colouring, which made him in recent years the most promising talent within the able guild of Bombay Aquarelle Painters!<sup>12</sup> Other critics admired him for 'the air of mystery in his paintings',<sup>13</sup> and remarked that he was the one who 'stands out as the surest and most sensitive painters of landscape in the whole exhibition'.<sup>14</sup> In this exhibition of the year 1946 his painting 'The Dasasvamedh Ghat' and other paintings from Banaras impressed the minds of the spectators.

Raza's nature was quite different from that of Newton Souza. Raza seems to be happy appreciating nature's beauty and expressing his own pleasure about it in his painting. Raza no doubt had sympathies for the leftists but he never had that inner urge to sacrifice everything for it. His mind was fascinated by other things like beauty of nature, niceties of colour range etc. Thus though he agreed with the grievances of his fellow artists in the Progressive Group and joined them, <sup>yet</sup> his main intention was to discard the old realistic style <sup>of</sup> ~~with~~ microscopic details and find a new style suitable to his own expression. <sup>His</sup> subjects <sup>rarely</sup> ~~never~~ expressed the ideology

of the group in the real sense.

As for Husain, he seems to be very reluctant to participate in any political controversies, but as he experienced hard sufferings and had to live amongst the poor people, he naturally sympathised with them and often painted the subjects related to common people.

Makbul Fida Husain was born in 1915 in Pandharpur in <sup>the</sup> Sulaimani Bohra's community. After his birth, his father moved to Indore and so his childhood and youth were spent there. Husain's mother died when he was 3 years old only and subsequently his paternal grandmother also <sup>died</sup> who had been looking after him since his mother's death,. Husain was sent to his maternal grandfather, who was the head of a religious sect, in Siddhpur, Gujarat. There he learnt to read and write Urdu. He was much attracted towards the geometric forms of Kufic calligraphy. He was sent to Madrasa in Baroda under his uncle who wrote religious poetry. Husain also wrote poetry under the pen name 'Haya'. In his adolescent age Husain returned to Indore to join his father. The impact of Indore life with a curious mixture of Hindu and Muslim culture had considerable effect on his attitude. His paintings show the influence of the spectacular Muhram <sup>a</sup> procession with the 'Panjas', the effigy of the mare (symbol of Mahammad's mare), the men wearing masks of <sup>tiger</sup> ~~figure~~, the yellow stripes painted on their bodies and having long claws, leading the procession (symbolising Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad). His paintings often show the forms of hand, horse and tiger. With these three types of motifs the calligraphy also is sometimes integrated to form a <sup>characteristic</sup> ~~good~~ pattern. Instead of completing his school education, Husain left it

and apprenticed to a tailor. Side by side with his work, he developed a hobby of painting. At the age of 17, he won a gold medal at the annual show at Indore. This provided him the encouragement to join the Art School at Indore. After 3 years he came to Bombay to join Sir J.J. School but had to go back soon as his father lost his job. Though he went back, his mind still longed to rejoin the art school. In 1937 he left his home, broke all relations with his family and came to Bombay to satisfy his own desire to pursue painting. He had to suffer a lot, as he had no money and had to live in Bombay in a cheap room in the slum area <sup>near</sup> ~~in~~ Grand Road and to do all sorts of odd jobs. He painted cinema posters, designed nursery furniture, painted cherubs on cots and rocking horses in fantastic colour schemes. His previous work of cinema posters probably brought spontaneity in drawing large size figures and paintings. The colourfulness of Indore School came naturally in his painting. In 1946 he came into lime light when he won the prize in annual exhibition of Bombay Art Society for his painting 'Sunehra Sansar' in oils. (Raobahadur Anant Shivaji Desai Topiwalla Prize). In the review, the critic R. Chatterji wrote, "M.F. Hussain's Sunehra Sansar stands out for its bold treatment and remarkable composition".<sup>15</sup>

In 1948, his painting 'Potters' had been exhibited in Bombay Art Society's Exhibition and it was then that Newton Souza who thought that Hussain was fit to be one amongst their group so he persuaded him to join the Progressive Group. However, Hussain never shared the <sup>attitude</sup> ~~feeling~~ of antagonism <sup>with</sup> ~~like~~ Souza; naturally <sup>the</sup> ~~are~~ feelings of hostility <sup>are</sup> ~~is~~ not expressed in his paintings as it is in Souza's.

His paintings have been figurative and they continue to be so and he often depicts the images from Indian countryside.

H.A. Gade was born in 1917 in Berar. He was the only person from the Progressive Group who had a sound University background. He graduated from Nagpur University earning degrees in Science and Education. He also got his preliminary art training at Nagpur and completed his diploma from Sir J.J. School of Art. He was noticed by his exhibits from 1946 onwards. In 1947 he exhibited his landscapes "Narrow lane" and "Fountain Jubbalpore" which were appreciated by the critic as 'Quite successful and follows "the style "similar to Raza'. Gade used opaque water colours and sometimes oils. He was mainly interested in landscapes and compositions based on Cezzanian principles. "His greatest asset is colour" the critic wrote and further remarked that he had a "good understanding of emotional values of colours" and "likes to work up by means of skillful colouring <sup>at</sup> as higher pitch than the subject of his paintings".<sup>16</sup> His intuitive quality of colour and its formal organisation was also recognised. As Gade had a sound academic background, he had given a deep thought regarding the formal aspects of painting. His complex colour schemes and unusual viewpoints of landscapes created a dreamlike quality to his paintings. Gade experimented in various ways but without a consistent direction. Often he came back to certain familiar stylistic features. Gade's experiments probably made Raza insist that he should join the Group, which he readily agreed.

Sadanand Bakre, the sculptor, was born at Baroda in 1920. He

received his art training <sup>in</sup> at Bombay at the J.J. School of Art where he was known as a very bright student. He won the Mayo Gold Medal reserved for the best student. His early sculpture pieces were mainly portraitures. His works attracted the art lovers as early as 1940. His portrait bust 'My Father' exhibited in that year's Bombay Art Society's exhibition was printed in the catalogue containing the photographs of selected exhibits. In 1942, his portrait bust 'Seer'<sup>18</sup> won the Sir Gomasji Jehangir Prize of Rs.100. His next year's exhibit, a bust titled 'My deeper self' was more interesting and expressive. His sculptures not only revealed good modelling but also some distinct way of expression. He was also interested in painting. We get the reference about his painting 'sketch from Ambarnath' which won His Highness Maharaja of Bhavnagar's Prize.<sup>19</sup> Bakre too had developed a sort of resentment against the so-called high-brows and intellectual art-critics. This together with his friendship with Ara together led him to join the 'Progressive Group' as one of its founder members.

The Group had decided to exhibit together. They first exhibited at King's Circle and other places. Ara exhibited out of Bombay too (at Surat and Rander). It was Dr. Hermann Goetz, the art-historian and the then Curator of Baroda State Museum, who invited the Group to exhibit at Baroda and also bought their works for the Baroda State Picture Gallery. This encouraged them considerably. After the exhibition at Baroda, they also held their show at Ahmedabad under the auspices of the Bharat Kala Mandal, but

surprisingly none of the paintings was sold there.

A real spectacular success came to the painters of the Progressive Group, when they exhibited in 1949, in Bombay Art Society's salon at Rampart Row. This exhibition was opened by the celebrated critic Mulk Raj Anand. It marked a complete break from the earlier art styles prevalent in Bombay as well as the individual styles of the members of the Progressive Group themselves. The six founder members, Ara, Raza, Souza, Gade, Bakre and Hussain, participated in this exhibition. The Group frankly admitted that the ideology expressed in the manifesto which was set at the time of formation of 'Group' 'was not practicable'. They wrote, "We have changed all the chauvinist ideas and the leftist fanaticism which we had incorporated in our manifesto at the inception of the group" and that ..... "the gulf between the so-called 'people and the artists cannot be bridged.. Today we paint with absolute freedom for contents and techniques almost anarchic<sup>e</sup>' and that they were now governed by only 'sound principles of art' like 'aesthetic order, plastic co-ordination and colour composition'.<sup>20</sup> They argued that they had no pretensions of making rapid revivals of any school or movement in art and that they have studied the various schools of painting and sculpture to arrive at a vigorous synthesis. So the disillusionment with their own early lofty ideals was complete. However, the radical change in their styles of painting and sculpture too, created a sensation amongst art-lovers and critics.

It will be interesting to search, what was the exact change in

their art-styles. Ara, the most direct painter of the group, whose subjects were confined to flowers, still-lives and landscapes, now came out with pictures revealing his social consciousness. He now painted beggars, prostitutes, gamblers and lunatics. These expressed his human sympathy and an extraordinary interest in every form of life. The critics remarked "His aesthetics are intuitive and spontaneous, untrammelled by an excess of thought or theory. In that lies his weakness but also his appeal. His large cartoons of card-players and beggars remind you of Peter Brughel in their human realism".<sup>21</sup> Raza who painted in impressionistic style (as seen in his famous 'Bori-Bunder'), (Plate 49; fig. 109) started organising colours by using geometrical patterns in cubistic manner. Raza, whose delicate and fluid water colour landscapes were delight of many exhibitions, crystallized his paintings in near-cubist compositions. His sense for melodious and exciting colour combined with this newly acquired discipline in formal structure made his paintings sincere and accomplished works. Amongst his landscapes, 'Kalyan',<sup>22</sup> and 'Banares',<sup>23</sup> were notable.

Sadanand Bakre, who used to be a neoclassicist even as late as eight months before the formation of the Progressive Group, plunged into abstractionism. It was regretted that in 'Bombay where sculpture was once at its best form of art expression, there were very few sculptors today' and naturally Bakre's impressive sculptures were received with much enthusiasm. His wooden sculpture 'Horse' showed a powerful abstract form. It was assured that his 'woman' undressing and 'Centaur' once seen 'can never be forgotten'.<sup>24</sup> His



plaster piece "Mother's Pride" (Plate 46 ; fig. 104 ) expressed monumental quality. The critic Jagmohan remarked, about it, that this sculpture "should be a double life-size tribute to motherhood adorning some maternity hospital".<sup>25</sup> His portrait of a high-minded journalist troubled by wicked thought was admired as 'good in its rendering and that it was ~~how~~ "much more true than the life-like likeness of the commercial bust-maker".<sup>26</sup> Bakre's one-man-show in 1951 at the Bombay Art Society's Salon, at Rampart Row showed variety of experiments. This 'Portrait of Narielwala', (Plate 49; fig. 111 ), and another sculpture 'Centaur' in wood, 'Grief' in concrete were exhibited in this exhibition. Wayne M. Hartwell remarked, "Although there is a tremendous amount of sculpture accomplished in India today, little of it gives evidence of the spirit of the twentieth century. Bakre's work stands in contrast to this vast bulk of material and in its original strength is a healthy indication that at least one sculptor is aware of the world in which he is living."<sup>27</sup>

Newton did not show any such violent change in his work. He only changed his name by adding 'Souza' to his name to distinguish his name from the famous scientist, otherwise the posterity would get confused with two Newtons. He stroved for formal values. However, his subject-matter was more important. As he had abandoned the leftist party by this time, the social realism also was abandoned from his pictorial concerns. His study of Rouault, Soutine, <sup>and</sup> Picasso probably brought a more rough and sumptuous handling of paint in his pictures. His Roman Catholic background

brought new testament themes, in his paintings as also the line bound figures, frontal representation, iconlike compositions. The heavy black line came through the influence of Rouault's paintings. The impact on his mind from the childhood, of the church ceremonies, the solemn dignitaries, their draperies and the mysterious atmosphere are revealed in his paintings. With ecclesiastical subjects Souza also contributed a self-portrait and a few other primitive style paintings derived from ancient Indian sculpture, especially from such monuments as Barhut of the Sunga period. In his full-length self-portrait, he distorted his own anatomy. He showed his own figure standing stark naked, with brush in his hand. The courage with which he exposed himself shocked the spectators. His preference for the elementary colours gave his work almost primitive qualities, haunting in their effect. In none of the other works is so much passion bridled by so much intellectual effort", the critic rightly remarked.<sup>28</sup>

As for Gaele, he remained satisfied with his Van Goghish landscapes painted from the high vantage positions. His luminous yellows and bright greens distinguished him as a landscapist and gave the evidence of his deep knowledge of both perspective and composition. His paintings included, 'The Street', 'Riverside', 'The Sunny Hour' which were most notable.

With Hussain the emphasis was on colour. While his forms remained 'deliberately undefined and vague he started distorting the forms which was seen in his portrait 'Arshad'<sup>29</sup> which was exhibited in the show and was also printed with the reviews. His

painting 'Mother and Child' was also notable. The reviews stated, "Hussain's painting of children and woman done in an impressionistic style with a rich colour sense are bound to please any one". It was also noted that as Hussain was making the fullest use of greys and off-shades in combination with strong cardinal colours, his painting looked 'richer in colour-scale rather than his other colleagues'.<sup>30</sup>

Because of the ~~sudden~~<sup>marked</sup> changes in the styles, the first exhibition of the Progressives created a stir among the artists, art-lovers and the critics. They received admiration as well as had to face harsh criticism too. Mulk Raj Anand, the eminent authority on art-history and criticism, who opened the show, commended the six 'Progressives' as the 'Heralds of a new dawn in the world of Indian Art'.<sup>31</sup> Critic Jagmohan remarked in his review, "The Progressive Artists' Group has done a commendable job. While critic Kay wrote, "...an entirely new type of Exhibition - revolutionary in thought and treatment and is a distinct breakaway from the old in art... this is the right trend that art should take, a right step towards the birth of a new art".<sup>32</sup> Contrarily Simon Pereira criticised, "...looking at the walls filled with canvases big and small, splashed with mad conflicts of violent colours and not a solitary suspicion of line, design or purpose that a normally intelligent person could grasp ... it was a collection of monstrocities by daubers who cannot paint a tree to look like a tree ..." and that few of the works displayed are an affront to good taste and an insult to intelligence. The fault I believe, is not so much with the artists as with the so-called critics "whose words these well-meaning

earnest young men foolishly take as gospel".<sup>33</sup> It was an indirect attack on Rudy Leyden, W. Langhammer and Sleshinger who encouraged the 'Progressives'. However, the change in the pictorial style had shocked the people and therefore usual patronage which the earlier groups had got, was missing from the Progressives.

Observing the styles represented by the Progressives, we feel that the struggle to find out something new in the technique and expression existed in the minds of the Progressives. The resentment of Ara (because his painting was rejected) and of Newton (as he was criticised as being 'too Proletarian') against the so-called authorities in Bombay Art Society gave a start to this movement. Bakre felt the same dissatisfaction about the prevalent art trends. As for the other three, they never expressed such strong resentment against the critics and the so-called authorities. However, they were also going in the direction of <sup>searching for</sup> ~~finding~~ a new way of expression. The earlier reviews give the evidences for the fact that all the six members of the Progressive Group were some way or other trying to create their own identity in their styles. None the less they did <sup>absorb a</sup> ~~take~~ few influences from the earlier painters. The exceptionally bright colour schemes and the bold and broad handling of brush which were the essential aspects of Indore painters and even Prof. Langhammer, were taken over by the Progressives. Almost all members of the Progressive Group painted in bright colour schemes - some even used pure colours. The use of impasto technique i.e. use of thick colours and broad patches, <sup>p</sup> slashy strokes and certain kind of angularity was also the chief quality. Similar broad brushwork and use of opaque colours was <sup>adopted</sup> ~~found~~ in water colours (with the only exception of

Ara who painted in transparent water colours). The forms were obviously simplified. What was different than the earlier Indore School was that the Progressives abandoned the realism and added distortions and simplification of forms. The distortions were more violent in the paintings of Souza and next to him in those of Hussain. One more noticeable thing in Souza's painting was the surface texture. The application of the thick porous layer of paint created an extraordinary tactile quality. The textural quality was also experimented by Raza, Gade and Hussain. Ara was more successful in water colours than oils and so the textural variety was less in his painting. Another thing about Ara was that his difficult monatory position made ~~it convenient~~ <sup>extensively</sup> ~~for~~ him to adopt transparent water colours ~~as in less quantity of colour, by adding more water in it one can get large surface painted.~~ The fourth aspect was that of the use of more or less dark outlines around the forms in paintings which we see in works by Ara, Hussain and Gade. This factor was even more prominent in Souza's paintings. His paintings showed thick dark, angular lines, sometimes drawn in black colour. This was due to the influence of the <sup>German</sup> expressionist painters. The angularity of the lines was probably the impact of Dubuffet's paintings who had already created considerable influence in Europe.

However, more important than all these technical aspects was the change in content. The progressives added a 'social-content' to the paintings and in this aspect, Souza, Ara, Hussain and Bakre revealed certain bitterness towards life which has resulted in the distortion and the iconoclastic expression in Souza's painting. He was, as if out to destroy everything that was supposed to be

sophisticated. Ara and Hussain, because they had to face poverty, had to live amongst the poor, and also had to struggle hard against various difficulties, came in contact with the lower classes of the society. Their attitude was not bitter like that of Souza towards life. Instead, their utter sympathy for the suppressed classes and the sufferings of the poor were expressed through their paintings. Ara's 'Gamblers', 'Prostitutes', 'Beggars' provide good examples of such sympathy. Hussain did the same with his rural images and female figures. Bakre too, through his sculpture pieces tried to express his feelings towards the subject rather than portraying academic realism. Convex and concave surfaces created charming patterns of shade and light in his sculpture pieces. He used different types of materials too, like metal, wood, plaster, clay etc. He achieved abstraction through simplified forms as well as by distortion. Raza though sympathised with the feelings of his colleagues, had a cheerful attitude towards life which was reflected through his bright pleasant colour schemes.

With the subject-matter, the technical quality was also equally conspicuous. Thus the evaluation of the critics was right that "with Raza, Gade, Bakre and Hussain, there was gradual conquest of subject-matter by purely formal or colourist preoccupation".<sup>34</sup> All these were rather conscious about their formal arrangement, application of colour, handling of the brush and thus the technical aspects of painting.

In Ara's and Souza's paintings content was more <sup>dominant</sup> ~~important~~ than technique. In Ara's paintings his spontaneous handling of colour and brushwork created an expressive quality which was appealing. In

Souza's painting feeling was <sup>paramount</sup> ~~important~~ but with it he was also conscious about the technical aspects like colour application, surface, quality, formal arrangement, etc.

The trend which the 'Progressives' showed was that while they <sup>shared</sup> ~~had~~ a few common <sup>characteristics</sup> ~~factors~~ to establish a homogeneity, yet their individual styles and the preference for the subject-matters differed. These common qualities were (i) bright colour-schemes, (ii) sometimes the use of primary colours or pure colours, (iii) simplified forms and deliberate distortions though not violent in the styles of <sup>each</sup> ~~all~~ of them; and (iv) the addition of the social content which was the soul of many individual art works. The last factor continued its existence in the style of the next group i.e. the Bombay Group of Painters and so we can say that this social content and the distortion of forms was the contribution of the 'Progressives' to be picked up by the next group. The credit of effectively breaking away from the academic or realistic style which was dominant for years together in Bombay also goes to the Progressive. It was the need of the time! This was bound to come one day, but the Progressives brought it most dramatically.

Before the Progressives there were few attempts in this direction. The period between 1940 to 1950 can be <sup>seen</sup> ~~called~~ as a transitional phase. <sup>consequent to</sup> ~~After the~~ initiating several <sup>in</sup> ~~in~~novations by the Indore Group the wheel of change started ~~running~~ <sup>gaining momentum</sup>.

In 1937 when Amrita Sher Gil won the Bombay Art Society's Gold Medal, a number of painters who had a strong faith in the realistic style of painting raised their eyebrows. The <sup>judgement</sup> ~~judging~~ of the Bombay

Art Society was criticised harshly and from both sides letters were published in the newspapers. After much correspondence and hot arguments, the controversy gradually died away. It remains as the most significant controversy of its kind in the development of modern art in India.

The above controversy indirectly gave the impetus to P.T. Reddy regarding the formation of 'Young Turks' Group in 1939-40. The nomenclature was inspired from the name of the Turkish leader 'Kemal Ataturk', who tried to modernise his nation. The group under the leadership of P.T. Reddy included A.A. Majeed, M.T. Bhopale, M.Y. Kulkarni, Moghul and Clement Baptista.<sup>35</sup> Their starting point was partly the traditional art of India with its formalized contours and flat colour patterns and partly the post-impressionist<sup>ic</sup> work of France with influences of Van-Gogh, Gauguin and Matisse faintly perceptible".

R.T. Reddy was born in a farmer's family in a remote village of Andhra Pradesh. In his school career also he won prizes in drawing. He left home against the wishes of his father and joined Dar-ul-aleom High School in Hyderabad and there fortunately he got the opportunity to paint the portrait of Lord Baden Powell at the Boy-Scout function held at the hostel, where Reddy was staying, which resulted in award of a scholarship to continue his studies in painting at the Sir J.J. School of Art, Bombay (even before he completed his Matriculation). As the admissions were closed before he reached there, he had to join the Nutan Kala Mandir for his art study. This helped him to get the admission in 1936 in the Third Year Class. Soon Reddy proved his talent at the Sir J.J. School of Art and won several prizes including the second prize in the Dolley Cursetjee Competition, and the Mayo Scholarship for Mural



painting as well as awards in Bombay, Poona and Simla Art Exhibitions.<sup>36</sup>

P.T. Reddy was continuously engrossed in his experiments to find his own expression. Though he was quite an expert in painting in the realistic style, he was not satisfied with this approach. He wanted to discard realism and find some style of his own to express his feelings. Amrita Sher Gil's paintings made him think about the qualities necessary for making a painting expressive. The controversy which arose after Amrita won the gold medal became fruitful as many aspects of good and bad paintings were discussed to prove that her contribution was valuable. Another thing which raised a stir amongst the art-lovers and common people was the famous controversy about rejected paintings which took place in 1941. The happy tendency of the critics to encourage new trends gave rise to the controversy of the 'Rejected Paintings'. In the year 1940 because of the shortage of space, the judging of the Bombay Art Society's exhibition was rather strict. A large number of paintings were rejected as they were not coming upto the standard according to the opinion of the judges. But <sup>along</sup> with these <sup>a few</sup> ~~four~~ ~~or~~ ~~five~~ good paintings by the artists (including Mr. Karanjgaonkar) whose other paintings were already selected had been rejected because of want of space. Many painters used the situation to prove that even good paintings were <sup>being</sup> rejected and that the <sup>judgement</sup> ~~judging~~ was absolutely biased. V.R. Rao and N.M. Kelkar along with a few other painters took the initiative of holding an exhibition of the rejected paintings. Rao also went further to put the blame wholly on Rudy Van Leyden, who had been included in the judging committee for the first time.<sup>37</sup>

Rao justified the show of 'Rejected Paintings' by giving examples of similar exhibitions in the European countries which provide a source of inspiration because they contain the new revolutionary trends.<sup>38</sup> In fact instead of containing such new trends this exhibition consisted of the old conservative type of works.

Sculptor Karmarkar and critic Karl Khandalavala wrote to support the opinion of the judging committee. Anyway the controversy made it again clear that instead of lingering too much at the same point it was necessary that the Indian artists should find a new way of expression and even the new type of subject-matter. The art critics of the period were emphasizing revolutionary spirit amongst the young artists and welcoming a new trend wherever it was seen.

The two controversies made the young artists aware about their own painting style. It is likely that P.T. Reddy found similar thoughts among his friends which led him to form a group of like-minded painters in 1941. It was named as 'The Contemporary Group of Painters', but because of their revolutionary spirit they were called 'Young Turks' and they were proud of the name. Reddy seemed to be still under the influence of the academic style and having an interest too in the Indian traditional style at the same time. It is reflected in his portrait of his own wife in realistic style and his painting 'The Spring' which shows influence of Ajanta. Both these were exhibited in the Bombay Art Society's annual show of the year 1939. But his landscape 'A scene From Bombay' was 'Treated in a novel way' according to the critic.<sup>39</sup> Subsequently his talent revealed itself in the way he evolved impressive —————>

arrangement of forms ~~impressive~~<sup>means of</sup> by simplification. This is revealed in his painting 'Consolation'. The curvatures of the Indian style painting became less frequent. Instead of the realistic landscape, the scene was now viewed from a high point and the simplified forms filled in with flat tones ~~appeared in his painting~~. Reddy's experiments in formal arrangement as well as handling of colour were noticed by the critics. He was admired by some as 'the father of Modern Indian Art'.

In 1941 R.V. Leyden, in his review of Bombay Art Society's annual show wrote, 'The young Bombay ~~Progressive~~<sup>are</sup> artists ~~is~~ represented by number of good paintings though we are told their best canvases were not hung. Majid's 'Yellow hut' and 'Composition' is appealing with disciplined and thoughtful<sup>f</sup> design. Reddy's blacksmith is well grouped. His landscape shows a fine rhythmic theme. More juicy colours would help him and his friends' pictures".<sup>40</sup> In 1942 the critic wrote about their exhibits at Bombay Art Society's exhibition, "A clash between the old and modern school is more evident in oil section. The young 'moderns' have the pride of place but were completely ignored by the judges while appreciating their enterprising pioneer spirit one would like to see more discipline and penetration in many designs. This is true about Majid and Reddy who are prominent in this group".<sup>41</sup> In these and other such reviews was admired the new spirit which was revealed in the works of Reddy and others but at the same time some critics, especially the critics of the vernacular press ~~ridiculing~~<sup>who</sup> his work and criticising<sup>ed</sup> it as not art, but as "a black cat on a charcoal bag in the dark room".<sup>42</sup> All this agitation was due to the fact that Reddy had ~~divated~~<sup>diverged</sup> from the traditional art.

A.A. Mayid and P.T. Reddy were prominent in the 1942 exhibition of the Bombay Art Society. Reddy's landscape 'Petrol Pump'<sup>43</sup> with an unusual arrangement and bold treatment and his Indian style composition 'Consolation' (Plate 43 ;fig. 95) showed his attempts to break from the old style. A.A. Mayid's 'Horses' (Plate 44 ;fig. 99) 'Flowers', 'Bloom of Life' also revealed similar attempt. While M.Y. Kulkarni's oil paintings 'Cosmos Flowers', 'Human Aspiration' and 'A street scene' showed his attempt towards gaining a beautiful surface texture with other aspects of painting.

Reddy and his friends showed a promise to bring fresh elements in their paintings. But unfortunately the group could not continue its experiments. Reddy himself plunged into 'Quit India Movement' against the British Government in 1942. He returned all the prizes and the Gold Medals he had won and even resigned the fellowship of Sir J.J. School of Art. Though we see his paintings in the catalogues for next couple of years, he could not remain consistent in his pursuit of Art. The other members also disintegrated and entered in different fields. Thus, the 'Young Turks' Movement proved to be short lived. It faded before creating a far-reaching impact.

Another similar attempt <sup>been made by</sup> ~~was~~ of the Calcutta Group in Bengal. As the Young Turks or Progressives were tired of seeing the old realistic style in the Bombay Art Exhibitions, similar situation <sup>prevailed</sup> ~~was there~~ in Bengal also. After Abanindranath Tagore, the Bengal school essentially painted romantic subjects and tried to <sup>portray</sup> ~~reflect~~ the <sup>glorious</sup> ~~past glories~~ rather than the present environment. The

originality was lost and endless repetition and sweet sober colour schemes prevailed. Jamini Roy was first to break from this revivalist style. No doubt the painters of Calcutta Group took inspiration from Jamini Roy who discarded the classical traditional Indian style derived from the miniatures and tried to assimilate the folk art of Bengal in his painting. The Calcutta painters took a courageous step to form a group. At some places the Calcutta Group is referred as the first group of <sup>modern</sup> painters in our country.<sup>44</sup> But P.T. Reddy formed his group of 'Young Turks' in 1941. Calcutta Group was perhaps the first such group in Bengal and was formed in 1943. The Group consisted of Rathin Moitra, Nirod Mazumdar, Gopal Ghosh, Paritosh Sen, Pradosh Das Gupta, Pran Krishna Paul, Bansi Gupta and Subho Tagore. The painters tried to break away from the style of painting sweet pictures on <sup>Indian mythological and ancient literature.</sup> ~~past glory of India~~. They attempted to find their own expression revealing the current national, political and cultural life. Their style showed influence of impressionism and post-impressionism as well as reflected the social content. Because of the severe Bengal Famine the Calcutta painters became increasingly aware that their old traditional style was unable to express their intense emotions and horrors of famine as well as war. Their inner tensions <sup>are</sup> revealed in their styles. Instead of painting <sup>the</sup> ~~past glories~~ <sup>heritage</sup>, they wanted to paint the modern situation as it was. <sup>a</sup> Rathin Moitra, Nirode Mazumdar, Paritosh Sen reflected this struggle in their paintings. Rathin Moitra coming from a Zamindar family of Calcutta, got his art training at Calcutta School of Art. He was very good in academic realism of western

school, but was not satisfied with it. Moved by the Bengal famine, he tried hard to find his own expressive style. Finally he combined the folk art of Bengal and post-impressionists elements. His paintings 'Two brothers', 'Santhal Dancers' are fine examples of harmonious and unusual arrangement as well as fine colour sense. He also sometimes used distorted forms of figures. In the exhibition of Calcutta Group at Bombay in 1945, his painting revealed social comment ('Destitute Mother', 'Bourgeois Women', 'Middle Class'). Nirode Mazumdar used simplified forms and rhythmic lines. Gopal Gosh was more interested in landscapes. His courageous use of exceptionally bright colours emphasised moods in his paintings. Paritosh Sen mainly used the play of light and shade in his paintings, he later on used distorted forms <sup>as in</sup> ~~like~~ Picasso's <sup>cubistic painting.</sup> Pran Krishan Paul discarded his miniature style and showed <sup>greater</sup> ~~more~~ influence of Jamini Roy and used the strange shapes of village toys to create a design in his painting. Pradosh Das Gupta's sculptures were expressive and reflected the horrors of war and sympathy towards the depressed. His sculptures were so powerful that they were capable of arousing emotions amongst the spectators. He later on turned towards simplification by using cylindrical forms and avoids followed by total abstraction.

In the Catalogue of their Exhibition in 1952, the group-members stated, '.... the guiding motto of our Group is best expressed in the <sup>s</sup>logan, "Art should be international and interdependent". They thought it advisable to synthesise the <sup>↑</sup>influences taken from other art-styles in the world. They further wrote, '... in our world of supersonic planes and televisions, it is not possible

nor desirable to preserve the lily-white purity of our tradition because art like science is also becoming the international activity". They claimed that they were trying to understand the spirit of our times and acknowledge the dictates of necessity".<sup>45</sup>

The members who joined the 'Group' later on were Sunil Madhav Sen, Kamala Das Gupta, Gobardhan Ash and Hemant Misra.

The Exhibition by the 'Calcutta Group' was received with warm welcome as well as harsh criticism ~~too~~. One critic wrote, "... and though it is catagorically denied that these artists are not affected by the dusty wind from the distant Europe, their national tradition appears to be submerged, full five fathoms deep, under the dirt carried by that dubious dirty mind".<sup>46</sup> But after five years the same critic wrote, ".... The typical products of the Calcutta Group are ugly and frightful and very far from attractive presentation of 'beauty' as ordinarily understood. Yet, these artists may claim that .... they are excitingly beautiful, as they seek to interpret a new order of beauty. "Others called them, "Pioneers of New Epoch in Indian Art".

Although the ~~The~~ Calcutta Group, ~~though~~ created a sensation in Bengal, it seems that their exhibition did not have much impact in Bombay. Rudy Van Leyden<sup>o</sup> wrote in Times of India about their exhibition, 'In the forward to a small publication of this group, it is said that Art when it ceased<sup>s</sup> to have an immediate social function, either loses its all vitality or becomes a passionate research into problems of form thrown up by the artist himself. I presume that the members feel that today's vital art had no social function

and that for this reason, they can be left to their own devices. For young artists with a revolutionary <sup>fever</sup> ~~hills~~, this is surprisingly negative attitude to take.....It is safe to say that art of Calcutta Group will neither be understood by, nor appeal to the masses of India".

Though the Calcutta Group did not create any far reaching impact on Bombay's art world, it showed that everywhere <sup>in India</sup> the World War and the <sup>struggle</sup> ~~movement~~ for the freedom ~~for India~~ <sup>generated</sup> ~~created~~ a tension in the mind of the artist which resulted into the revolutionary break from the art-style of <sup>the</sup> past.

The work of the Progressives in Bombay and that of the painters of the Calcutta Group is worthy <sup>of</sup> comparison. Both the groups arose from the similar spirit of revolt against the then prevailing art trends, and both were encouraged in their revolt by the foreign critics as well as connoisseurs. Both therefore became equally acquainted with the Modern European trends of art, and were considerably influenced by them ~~too~~. Considered from the point of view of the academic education, we find that most of the Calcutta Group-members had received their graduation from some or other university and thus were well-educated compared to the painters of the Progressive Group, who were not highly educated like them, with the single exception of Gade, who was a post-graduate from Nagpur University. The prominent member of the Group, Ara - was totally naive as he did not receive any art-training at all or any educational qualification. The remaining members had their art-training at the J.J. School of Art, Bombay. So compared to the Progressive artists,



the Calcutta painters had a better opportunity. However, the Bombay Progressives created a dazzling influence on the existing art-world compared to that by the Calcutta Group. We can compare here the similar-minded painters from both the groups, viz. Gopal Ghosh and Raza, <sup>both of whom</sup> concentrated on landscapes. But the speed and the sweep with which Raza went from realism towards total abstraction overshadowed the work of Gopal Ghosh. Similarly both Paritosh Sen and Souza were influenced by Picasso but Souza was more violent and so more forceful ~~too~~ in his distortions.

The Progressives attained a bright success and created a stir amongst the art lovers and general public of Bombay. Though their emergence <sup>took place</sup> ~~was~~ little later <sup>than</sup> ~~compared~~ to that of the Calcutta Group, their influence was so dominating that the Calcutta Group painters took initiative in arranging a Joint-show with them<sup>47</sup> at Calcutta in 1950. Gade himself went to Calcutta with the paintings of the Progressive Group.<sup>48</sup> This ~~joint~~ show was interpreted by the <sup>re</sup> ~~critics~~ as a challenge to the conservative art and the painters were admired as the precursors of ~~the~~ <sup>a</sup> new movement. Along with such happenings which influenced the rise of the Progressive Group, one more important factor was the presence of the trinity of the foreigners who took interest in the art-world of Bombay and played an active part in it. These included Rudy Van<sup>o</sup> Leyden, Prof. Walter Langhammer and Shlesinger. All these were war time exiles from Central Europe who came to India at the time of the outbreak of the Second World War.

Rudy Van<sup>o</sup> Leyden played a <sup>to</sup> ~~por~~minent role as an art critic,

upto early 1950s. German by birth, he came <sup>to</sup> India in 1933. He had a German Doctorate in Geology and had travelled widely in Europe. He started his career in India as a Commercial artist. He joined Times of India and remained associated there for several years. He started writing reviews of the art-exhibitions from 1939. He wrote in Times of India as well as in Evening News and Illustrated Weekly; under the name R.V.L. or Denley (in Illustrated Weekly for the commerical designs or cartoons). He helped to bring modern spirit <sup>in</sup> Indian art and encouraged the young amateurs <sup>in their endeavour</sup> ~~who were striving~~ to ~~for finding~~ a new style of expression. After a short visit to Germany, he returned to India in 1947. In 1952, he became the publicity manager of Volcart Brothers - an Indian Society of advertisement-ers. He later on worked as a general manager of Voltas. He himself was a good painter. His brother and wife Nina too painted. Nina also painted illustrations for Childrens' books. The three together had an exhibition of their paintings and the amount of the sale of the paintings was used for the Artists' Aid Fund. It was he who took prominent part in setting up the Bombay Art Society's salon at Rampart Row. He encouraged the Progressive Artists Group and supported them firmly in their venture. It was he who found the talent in Ara and encouraged and developed him to become a prominent painter of the times. He gave lectures on History of Art as well as published articles on art in the "Design" magazine, 'Art and Culture' magazine and 'Times of India' etc.

Prof. Walter Langhammer, born at Graz in Austria in 1905, and graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna in 1927. He

taught painting in the State College of Art in Vienna for 11 years. He had to leave Germany due to his anti-Nazi feelings and also because his wife was <sup>a J</sup><sub>^</sub> Jew. It was probably due to his Parsi student Miss Siloo Vakil that he came to India<sup>49</sup> and took a job as an art-director in the 'Times of India' press. Soon he established himself very well in the art-field of Bombay. He was incorporated in several committees of the Bombay Art Society.

Langhammer himself was a good painter and painted in <sup>a bolder version of</sup> Impressionistic style. Precise in his drawing and expert in the handling of impasto technique, he soon attracted the young art-students with his paintings in bright colour-schemes and broad patches of oil colours. His overwhelming admiration for the bright sunlight of India reflected in his street scenes and portraits with contrasting patterns of shade and light. His paintings depicting the views of Bori-Bunder and Fountain area were specially appreciated. Langhammer's command over his brush was amazing. The young art-students were wonderstruck by his speedy rendering of the <sup>slap dash</sup> ~~slashy~~ strokes of pure colours creating an exceptionally bright effect in the painting. It was a joy to watch him when he was rendering a demonstration of painting. Crowds of art-students, as well as artists gathered to see his demonstration and to know the secret of how he built the whole structure of his painting in a very impressive manner.

Langhammer was truly responsible <sup>in</sup> ~~to~~ inspiring number of artists of that period. It is true that his existence made the Bombay art-scene more alive and vibrant. Amongst the young painters inspired by his works were mainly Raza and Bakre. Especially Raza seems to

have come under the spell of his style of painting. Several of his street scenes and landscapes reflected this influence.

Langhammer exhibited his paintings regularly in Bombay Art Society's annual exhibitions and won several awards including the Gold Medal which he won in 1939 for his portrait of Mrs. Shirin Vimadalal Vakil, (Plate 41 ; fig. 91 ).

Langhammer's first one-man-show was held at the Convocation Hall in 1942, and then onwards his regular shows every year became the most eagerly awaited for by the Bombay Artists, students and art-lovers. Langhammer's work reflect the Germanic variety of Impressionism. It will be interesting to compare his painting with the Expressionist painter Kokochka<sup>s</sup>. We find some of his paintings combining the expressionistic qualities with the impressionistic techniques in his painting.

Ill health compelled him to leave India with his wife in 1957.

Schlesinger was an emigree Jew from Austria and an admirer and a collector of ~~the~~<sup>art</sup> works. He encouraged the young ~~Progressives~~<sup>P</sup> and also offered them a monthly mon<sup>e</sup>etary help. He also bought their paintings.

Thus these three foreigners were responsible in establishing a channel of communication to keep the Progressives well informed about the new art/movements in the Western World and convinced them that they were on the right path. The Progressives owe much to these three persons. When the artists of the Progressive Group were

in difficulties, these three helped them to tide over. All these three came from Central Europe and had naturally the preference for the expressionist idiom. It was quite logical that they supported the Progressives who were striving to express their own feelings 'Indian Art needs new blood' said Leyden. It was true, as the Bombay art-style was for several years repeating similar types of mythological paintings which eventually became ~~later on~~ lifeless. The subjects were only of the Indian Gods and Goddesses or the incidents from past. The Indore Painters started painting the scenes from contemporary life. The Progressives added a deeper social meaning to it.

The influence of the Progressives was felt strongly in the art/world of India. The young students of art looked at their pictures with admiration. The influence of this new trend reached as far as Kashmir. Raza, when he visited Kashmir and stayed there for some period, the young artists gathered around him and were inspired by the qualities of his paintings. They formed a group and called themselves as the Progressives. These Progressive artists of the war-ravaged Kashmir, organized the first Art Conference.<sup>50</sup> Percy Brown, the art/historian inaugurated the conference and declared the exhibition open on September 7, 1949, at Hadow Memorial College, Shrinagar. The painters S.N. Butt, Triloke Kaul, P.N. Kachru, Edna Bellefontaine, Zaffer, M. Yusuf and Prof. Fida participated in the Exhibition. The catalogue of the exhibition acknowledged the inspiration received from Raza. The same group exhibited at New Delhi in October, 1949 at the Exhibition Hall of

the All-India Fine Arts and Crafts Socieity, New Delhi.<sup>51</sup> Dr. Humayun Kabir declared it open.

The Progressive Group established their dominance even in other parts of India. Their movement opened up new horizons. They regularly exhibited in Bombay Art Society's annual show as well as that of the Art Society of India, as well as the other exhibitions. They also held their own group shows every year until 1953. The members also had their individual one-man-shows.

Though the Progressives created a dominant influence for ~~the~~ some time, the group itself could not survive for a long and the breaking away started from 1949, the year when they launched their first adventure openly in Bombay. The prominent members left for Europe one after another and settled there except Ara and Hussain. In 1949 Souza left for London, Raza and Bakre left for Paris. Raza got a French Government Scholarship. He went there and studied at Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris and at Studio Edmund Menze and finally to settle in Paris since 1950. Akbar Padamsee who was not the actual member but was associated with them for a long time, also left for Paris. Ara, Gade and Hussain were left behind. Their new members Krishan Khanna and Gaitonde were now associated with the Group. This new group carried on with their exhibitions. The 1953 exhibition was their last exhibition. In that exhibition we see also the new names - Mohan Samant and Raiba. One lady artist, Miss Bhanu Rayopadhyaya also exhibited with them for a short period but then she left and turned her attention to costume designing. It will not be improper to mention that, <sup>i</sup> It is the same lady, now Mrs. Bhanu

Athaiya, who recently won the Oscar award for her costume designing for the famous film 'Gandhi'.

Another painter of the Group was Raiba who painted in the Indian Decorative style. A.A. Raiba, born in 1923, received his art training and Diploma in Art at Sir J.J. School of Art, Bombay. He was deeply interested in the Indian miniature paintings. He joined the Progressive Group and exhibited with them in the 1952 shows. He depicted subjects from Indian life. His paintings on Indian rural life were appreciated. However, Raiba soon found that his style based on the miniature paintings was completely different from the rapid painting style of the Progressives and so he left the Group. The foreword of the catalogue was written by Krishan Khanna. But the Group became inactive collectively as the old ideology had lost its relevance and the 1953 exhibition was only the <sup>a a</sup>amalgam of several styles.

Ara continued to paint still-lives and nudes but most impressive are his still-lives with simplicity and vigour. Ara, Husain and Gade became the members of the 'Bombay Group' which arose after the disbanding of the Progressive Group. Ara also formed afterwards the 'Zero' Group with poets, artists and writers as the members. The purpose of this new group was to stress equality and humanity. Now Ara is working as the Secretary of the Artists' Centre, at the Rampart Row, Bombay. Gade exhibited for some time. He had a retrospective exhibition in 1979 which revealed his various attempts in formal arrangements. Raza went towards total abstraction. He now uses squares, diagonals and circles in his arrangements. But

the former quality of bright colour schemes is still there and it reveals the quality of tropical landscapes which was always present in his landscapes from the beginning.

Husain rose to prominence as a member of the Progressive Group but afterwards he developed on a line quite different from his fellow members. After Bakre, Raza and Souza left for Europe, Husain joined the Bombay Group together with Ara, Gade, Gaitonde and Samant. However, he did not keep a constant link with the Group. Already an admirer of Mathura sculpture, Husain visited Khajuraho in 1954 and painted a series on 'Khajuraho Women' and it was here that his typical high-breasted and taut female figure of the kind we find in Mathura sculpture, representing the energy and dynamism took form in his paintings for the first time. This type afterward became his basic mode of delineating the figure.

Husain also used folk imagery from around 1951. His love for Basholi paintings also added to it. These brought in his paintings hot, bright colours and flat application of the paint in large areas, image types adapted from folk toys, dolls, carts, etc. with staring fish eyes and prominent hand gestures. His important paintings like "Zameen" (1955), "Indian Village" (1955) and "Between the Spider and the lamp" (1956) were painted in this period. His 'Zameen' won for him the national award of Delhi in the year 1955. It is painted in a long panel which reminds of a scroll painting due to its long size and image format. It is divided into panels, in one panel a huge black sun and a seated nude woman painted with pure red are seen, there is a black child between her legs. This



woman has two hornlike protuberances over her forehead. This figure suggests the symbol of earth from whose belly man emerges. Other panels depict the images of cock, serpent, a tree, a pack-mule, a hand, a multi-armed man, woman churning the milk, etc. thus giving the glimpses of the rural life. 'Zameen' remains significant due to the way Husain has combined the folk and symbolic elements and the way in which he has arranged the sequences of forms like pat-painting enhancing its quality by the colourful rendering which is essentially Indian.

His another painting 'Between the Spider And The Lamp', (Plate 51 fig. 115) is important due to the fact that it suggests Husain's departure from earlier style of arrangement. It has depicted groups of three standing women which are painted with flat application of colour. Two figures are painted in monochromatic tones. In between is a mask and figure facing each other. The figure on the left side holds a lamp on her head and is addressing the middle figure. But this figure seems to be more attracted towards the spider hanging from the thread in her hand. The figures are drawn with heavy limbs and rigid poses. The dark and bold outlines of the figures, the calligraphic forms on the top and the spider itself, all together create a strange effect.

Critic Geeta Kapur has pointed out that this strong impulse of Husain to portray rural India "puts him in sharp contrast to his immediate contemporaries, such as Souza, Ramkumar, Satish Gujral' who chose to locate themselves in the urban environments in recognition of the fact that it was the ravaged, city-bred Indian with

whom they could most closely identify". It is true that though living in urban atmosphere Husain's fascination for rural subject is constant.

The period from 1954 to 1961 was significant as it brought an international recognition to Husain due to his exhibits in 'Venice Biennale' (1954), exhibitions in several countries in 1959 and International Biennale Award in Tokyo in 1959.

Along with the use of folk image, symbols and rural factor, another significant aspect of his painting is that he has "captured <sup>h</sup> the spirit of ancient Indian sculpture" in his paintings as N.S. Bendre points out. Bartholomew analyses this point. "Husain has never carved in the round yet in many of the figures in his paintings, in that detail from 'Hoo-o-e', for instance or in the shape of the lips of the women, the cast of the eyes, the placing of those tender and expressive hands, or the stance of the torso, we see Husain's awareness of sculpture, particularly of the plasticity of sculpture".

Husain's works appeal people from all classes in society. He has that vital impulse to spread his sensibilities far and wide. His imagery is <sup>k</sup> kaleidoscopic which touches each and every element in society. He is also always aware of the contemporary happenings. In the days of emergency he painted Indira Gandhi in the form of Durga and Janaki which were depicted high above the level of the common people and in almost deified forms. He painted a series in homage to Mother Teresa's valuable services under the title 'Homage to motherhood' where he symbolically painted the white

saree of Mother Teresa with blue border, the drapery without a face and yet creating a sense of volume, symbolically providing shelter to orphans. Recently he even depicted the popular star Amitabh Bacchan in his paintings. It will be point of controversy as to how far he is right in doing so, however, it is a fact that Husain has his own statement on every possible topic in current happenings. Though Geeta Kapur has criticised him for always taking the safe side, she has also pointed out that 'in his tendency to romanticize, Husain is in line with Amrita Sher Gil, Jamini Roy and George Keyt."

Shiv Kapur's comment in this matter is significant. He remarks, "what Indian Art needed was a creating of bridge between old and new. Starting around 1928, five major Indian painters have helped to shape that bridge—Rabindranath, Amrita Sher Gil, Jamini Roy, George Keyt. <sup>u</sup> Husain is the last of the bridge builders".

Souza's paintings reveal the contrasting feelings of sympathy as well as violence. On the catalogue of his one-man show at 'Gallery One', London, he printed his own photograph<sup>52</sup> cut in the middle where a strip painted with monstrous teeth was inserted, (Plate 50 ;fig. 113 ). The effect is shocking as usual. His image of violence is in glaring contrast to his drawing on the last page. However, his paintings rarely show a peaceful attitude. Andrew Sinclair rightly says, "Frustration of longing makes Souza rave in his art and rarely love. When he does love, he paints the jewelled cups of the hosts, or buildings with round domes of peace set

among trees..... It is this fierce tension between the terror of the flesh and its curious sympathy, between the fear of the flesh and its strange still beauty on earth that makes Souza suffer and show his suffering and his rare ease".

Recently he painted 'Chemical paintings' using the cuttings from glossy prints from magazines and bleaching parts of them with chemicals, <sup>S</sup>scribbling on it. He painted the theme of Bangladesh genocide in this style. He painted these chemical pictures after he migrated to America.

Though the Progressive Artists' Group proved to be short-lived it achieved a significant place in the Bombay art world. It was responsible in liberating the art activity from the influence of the old academic style of Bombay School, and contributed a few new aspects. The next group of painters which became prominent after 1950, was the Bombay Group. The aspects of social content and simplified forms were taken by these artists from the works of the Progressive Artists' Group. Souza's paintings before 1960 are comparatively more significant than those in 60s and 70s.

Souza's images are mainly expressionistic. His colour too with its intensity adds to the effect. His handling of the colour is spontaneous. He often squeezes the tubes on the surface and slap them freely. However, rather than the textual surface, his strong line is responsible to gain the effect. Souza is equally strong in his writing too. His efficiency as a writer is seen

in the collection of his articles published in "Words and Line". It was he who drafted the 'Manifesto' for the Progressive Group. He always wrote introductions to his own catalogues. In both his paintings as well as in his writings, he attacks the Bourgeois element and their ideas about sophistication. He really represents the grotesque element in his style of painting.

Though the 'Progressive Artists' Group' proved to be a short-lived attempt, it achieved a significant place in the Bombay art-world. It was responsible for liberat<sup>ing</sup> the art-style from the influence of the old academic style of Bombay School, and contributed few aspects. The next group of painters which became prominent after 1950, was the Bombay Group. The aspects of social content and simplified forms were taken by these artists from the Progressive Artist Group.

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*Appendix*

Review of Husain's 'The Voice' Design, September 1958, page 226.

The Voice:-

Voice is a name of the recent painting by M.F. Husain—unusual as concerned the size and its content—sombre and arresting them; its impact immediate though the message it conveys is not easily understood. It was presented to Bombay's artgoing public recently in as an 'experimental presentation of a painting by M.F. Husain, produced by R.V. Leyden". The painting was placed on props facing the audience and was slowly unveiled in near-darkness. Lights were then turned on it from one end until finally the entire canvas was lighted. Bartok's music, reading of a poem composed by the artist and commentary by a producer, more poems by Eliot, Husain, Rilke, some music — this time from the Brubeck Quartet and then in conclusion Bartok's Sonata for unaccompanied violin.

Afterwards general discussion between sponsors and the audience was most coherent and interesting strange Quixotic attempt to integrate totally different arts by persons who know and understand fully the meaning and purpose of each of the component arts. It would have been possible if Husain may have taken Bartok's music as a starting point of his work and interpreted it visually through the medium of his painting — no integration — failure.

The discussion showed by and large a very lively awareness of art values. A number of interesting points were made. Production was an interesting (because of stimulating discussion) and also an embarrassing experience (because of the altogether sorry impression conveyed by an experiment) into which quite sometime, effort and energy must have been put.