

AN INDIAN SUMMER

Historically and traditionally, Indian music has been associated since time immemorial with different seasons, even hours of the day leading to the night. Romance of dark clouded skies of monsoon has been evoked for instance with the Raga Megha; described thus in Sangeet Darpana:

Nelouttapan Bhavpurindu Samanya vakya:

Pitambar istrishit chatak yachayamaan:

'With sinuous body, shining like the blue lotus and face (as beautiful) as the moon, In golden drapes, to whom the thirsty chatak-birds pray.....'

A season in India changes dramatically and with it lives of the people. The whole pattern of the day adapts itself to the season and the advent of each is celebrated with ritualistic song, dance & festivals, often propitiating the Divine to ward off calamities of draught, floods, or plague. (in rural India, especially). The suite of paintings that represent an Indian summer in Art Alive's present exposition share despite their very individualistic and therefore distinctive styles, an inherent joie de vivre, in the choice of colour-palette or mood. In India, as the scorching sun sets alight the skies, the vast desert tracts, forests and glades reverberate with joy. It is Baisakh, the beginning of a new year & to bring in an auspicious year, there is singing & dancing at festivals like Bihu in the East or Pongal in the South. The trees are ablaze with bright 'gulmohor' jacaranda, & 'tesu'.

Inspired by the presence of colour, in the skies, in the paddy fields, in the life of people around them, the artists appear to have dipped their brushes in the purples, crimsons, greens, yellows and blues and given expression to their own feelings, associations, memories. In the painted images and sculpture, we share some of those thoughts.

'This is the aim of my explorations: examining the traces of happiness still to be glimpsed. I gauge its short supply.'

[Marco Polo says in Italo Calvino's 'Invisible Cities.'

Tin soldiers march stiffly erect, and in the saffron - diffused world of impossible make-believe, a girl strikes a pose, armed skittishly stretched back. A prancing horse nuzzles a child. Elsewhere, other puppet-like figures meld and pirouette, some in tinsel crowns and others in cone-shaped hats seemingly oblivious to the others. Amidst the frolic and caper, Ganesha, elephant-God, finds himself center-stage, and instead of feeling bewildered looks happy instead to be a part of the plot.

This then is Sakti Burman's world of fantasy, the aim of his artistic explorations continuing to examine and seek traces of happiness that can be glimpsed, still.'

'My childhood memories are always present alongside the realities of the present', Sakti writes. The artist's canvas continues to reverberate in the meanwhile, with echoes of festivities witnessed in the past like 'gajon' or charak' when merry processions led by a motley band beating tin drums wound their way down Bidyakut lanes, gathering in their wake a gaggle of laughing children. Interspersed with mythic

configurations are images of his present life in Paris, his daughter Maya or grandson Ganapathy. The backdrop is a screen of foliage-fronds and flower motifs lending a fragile dreamy quality to his magical world.

The haunted fact of a woman in Anjolie Ela Menon's painting brings to mind the artist's deep concern for the un-privileged she occupies her working space with. Says she, "I inhabit a place which I can share with no one for any length of time. This place is subterranean, remote and inaccessible. It is a lonely moonscape of my own making, trespassed upon by the occasional bird or animal and the protagonist is often the person yearn to touch, the person I long to be just me screaming to be let out". The fact of the woman in Anjolie's work, sepulchral and pensive, is reminiscent of her predilection to paint faces that contain in their hidden contours, a life's experiences and burdens.

Vaikuntam's works focus on the Telengana people; a subject that has been devoting the last many decades of his life to. The images of the swarthy men, pandits as well as village tradesmen reappear in their saturnine temperament, a people given to simple pleasures and a self-contained quietude, with 'nammams' (tilaks).

The woman Vaikuntam's very own Gaja Gamini, in her traditional bright Sircilla saris is adorned with jewellery and has turmeric smeared on her forehead - is ever familiar following the painter's career. The palette of rich crimson emerald green ,yellow or electric blue captures the spirit of the people who fight perhaps a losing battle with the new power Mafias.Afterall, it was only after the advent of expensive modern powerlooms that there was such a tragic & collective loss of livelihood in the region,targetting the poor traditional weavers of the region. Ruination and despair as a consequence, caused thousands to take their own lives.

The Telegana of Vaikuntam's youth once alive and pulsating with song, festivities and colour, where jatara-players enthralled the village-folk with their thundering vaudeville is silent.

Yet on his canvas, it is as if the Telengana people are celebrating Bathukamma again for a brief make-believe moment, the ghosts of Sircilla have been laid to rest.

A deep & abiding passion in textile design lend an interesting design lends an interesting dimension to the paintings of Rini Dhumal. Minutest details are paid heed to, in the sartorial piccadillos of the artist 'nayikas'.If Vaikuntam's art concerns in specific the weft and weave of the Sircilla handloom, Rini Dhumal's passion for textiles reflects her journey down the silk route and beyond the Iron curtain criss-crossing the globe.

The motifs patterning the gauzy 'Odhnis' and skirts can be traced to the Mughal eras as much as contemporary times. The narrative structure of Rini's art composes itself around characters the artist has encountered and qualities she has perceived. The women are, in their postures, unfettered,fearless and strong.They refuse to be bound to any geographical locale seeking instead to belong to the fictional world of Isabel Allende for one.In contrast, the figure of the monk in his saffron robe, is meditative and introspective in demeanor. There is a pliant quiet air about the monk, familiar to some of us who travelled across China together and visited monasteries trailing in the process,,the monk's looming shadows!

Rini's art revisits these places and memories of another day .Monuments, 'souks',mazhars, the faces of the wizened old, their faces mapped with wrinkles, the young and of course the intrepid woman who 'lives on poetry, percussion and singing...' who lives in a far away place which breaks through to our world' [Clarissa Pinkola Estes 'Wild Women'],constitute the artist's inner-world.She seeks not to change the universe but lives content in her own space,trying to better the lives of those her own life touches.

Lalu Prasad Shaw's chiseled & skillful portraiture of a woman's head, belongs stylistically to an oeuvre the artist has perfected over the decades. Shaw's quintessentially Bengali babus [Nabakumars in their earnest round-rimmed spectacles] & bibis are seen to reflect a 'Bangalianna' be it in their Khopa [coiffures] or the doorey saree[the striped Dhaniakhali the ladies of Calcutta are so partial to].

Shaw draws inspiration from the romantic fiction of the masters and in their depiction, instills the characters with a quality that is imaginatively aligned to the character of Satyajit Ray's Charulata or then,Suchitra Sen's many celluloid portrayals.

Involuntarily, you remember Shankar's magnum opus 'Chowringhee',imaginatively woven around the lives and times of Calcuttans in another era fraught with tragedy and romance.Looking at Shaw's portraits the 'probashee' Bengali far away from home will have nostalgic yearnings for shady boulevards fragrant with the husky fragrance of 'chaatim phool' Sarat Chandra & Tagore, Ray and Tapan Sinha in the quietly feminine faces,in those eyes alight with romance.

In the depths of the moonshine/sunray dappled waterscape, swans glide by and lotus blooms. Emerging out of the shimmering deep, the magnificently proportioned mythic devi is gorgeously bejeweled and bedecked in finery befitting the diva she is. A mysterious smile flits on her lips,and she seems to be smiling as if lost in a dream/reverie.As if she ,like her contemporary mortal sister,is awaiting her lover to keep a tryst ,a divine Nicole Kidman!

Jayasri Burman's captures in her painted world of fantasy, poetry, music and romance, transcending in the process the emotional cultural & mythic histories of the painted images .Traditionally the matsyakanya or other mythical beings appear stylistically as devis from Bengal's ancient patachitra scrolls in their features and postures, long tresses framing the voluptuous contours. Deified and in mystical rapture, she however is also a temptress, primeval and strong. Half-robed and sultry, she is at once alluring and distant. The dichotomy of a painting that has its inspiration on Puranic traditions/texts & divesting the iconic with flesh & blood passions of the contemporary woman is rooted in Jayasri's personal explorations.To look beyond the surface submissiveness and docility is critical, only then can one discover the more complex issues.

The frisson of disquietude is implied if only gently but assertively. The goddesses have souls that feel the tremor of love & loss. She is the mother, nurturing in her womb the unborn female foetus.

Primary colours set alight Paresh Maity's canvas as the painter playfully explores with magnified forms of the human anatomy. The scale of the figurations and the use of bold reds, yellows, blues add a dramatic dimension that is a marked contrast from his early water colours. The early water-colours muted and quiet as they bled on the paper,became almost spectre-like shadows in their final rendition.In a dramatic shift, the present oils are bold and magnified in their abstraction.There is in the anatomical and facial detail, such magnificent proportion that the details take on the roles individuated entities/forms in their own right.

Overt sexuality in the depiction of the men and women and erotic passion play is very often the subject of Maity's paintings. The artist does not feel the need to shy away from boudoir intimacies but the intimacy teeters on its suggestiveness - in the kohl-rimmed eyes of a woman or silhouettes, half-hidden

by dark tresses, revealing maybe the outline of a breast or curve of the back. Paresh Maity's art celebrates thus, the ecstasy of a man-woman relations that is primeval and joyous. The beauty of a woman's body is meant to be immortalised in art erotically, if Bollywood panders to the more risqué version made popular in songs like....'Cholee ke pichey'....that's another story!

'If you are the dreamer, I am what you dream

*But when you want to wake, I am your wish & I grow strong with all
magnificence and turn myself into a star's vast silence above the strange &
distant city. Time.'*

[The Book of House, Rainer Maria Rilke]

In Arpana Caur's painted world the clock strikes time that is synchronized by another time zone, known to the artist alone and none else. It is an eternity where moments stretch and stand still, as if waiting for the woman to complete the task she is engaged in at the present moment, loath to distract or disturb, time stands stilled. In the hushed hour tranquility reigns as the protagonist - is it Arpana/ her alter-ego or every woman[?]weaves or scissorson, brows knit in deep concentration, as she bends to her chores, scissors going snip-snip or the loom rotating, cutting lazy circles in mid-air. The woman's image appears alone or mirrored with others as if in reflections. The narrative structure of Arpana's painterly realm is devoid of any acute physical urgency and her dramatis personae are, sans emotions, creatures who inhabit a timeless space.

'The enlightenment of Buddha, the thundering experience of Gautam Siddharta in search of redemption.... energy, spiritual power and the world of growth and organics determine the active men in the picture so Arpana' writes Ernst W Koelnsperger, 'Norms, fates, goddesses of destiny' are the determining qualities of the women she portray.

Laxma Goud's terracotta and bronze busts trace its artistic lineage to the senior artist's illustrious stint as a serigraphic and painter. The erotically expressive features of the female forms incorporate both modernist and primitive consciousness arriving in the process at a genre that is iconographically Laxma Goud's own. Skillfully embellished, complete with intricate patternings of motifs and layers of ornate jewellery, the Telengana women are not merely strikingly sensual but boldly at ease with their sexuality. Goud's virile and playful forms make for an arresting portrait gallery as the heads/busts are clearly individuated, at times provocative, gentle, mischievous or in case of a 'nayika', petulant and lusty. In their drapery, adornment and expressions the sculptures add an exiting dimension to Laxma's oeuvre.