

HARIDASAN AND HIS PAINTINGS

Very few would have tried to delve into the origins of a new art movement in the making to acknowledge that K.V. Haridasan is the pioneer of Neo-Tantra Art in India. The late K.C.S. Panicker, founder of the Chola Mandal Art Group, who was his teacher, had always emphasized the need for drawing inspiration from the collective unconscious of the Indian tradition. That eventually led to a new Indian School of Painting viz. the Neo-Tantra School, enunciated by K.V. Haridasan.

Haridasan was born in the house of Keecheri in the village bearing the same name in North Malabar in Kerala. His father painted for his daily worship a Sri-Yantra, he being a devotee of the Goddess. To him the thousand names of Lalitha (Sahasranamam) meant more than mere recitation. It was contemplation for realisation. The beginnings of Haridasan's present concepts of Art emerged out of this background.

He also had the advantage of growing up with the rhythms and colours and forms of ritual performances like the Teyyam, the "dancing dieties". Of the two of his elder brothers one is a creative writer and linguist and the other displayed a talent for painting which he later gave up. Drawings printed in magazines to accompany stories by elder artist friends, a practice just come in vogue in Kerala, used to excite his imagination during his student days.

After graduating in psychology from the Presidency College, Madras, he joined the Madras School of Art encouraged by Sri. K.C.S. Panicker. He initially painted figures integrated into landscapes with dominant linear characteristics. But the elusive Indian identity enveloped by Western stylistic idioms in Indian art scene was the real challenge faced by him.

In 1967, Haridasan began practising Yoga to complement his pursuits. In 1968 he held an exhibition of a series of paintings named 'Yantra Series' for establishing his views on painting, according to Haridasan that art is essentially a kind of myth making and the Indian myth was evolved out of spiritual realisations. This was followed by the 'Bija Yantra' Series more complex and highly evocative. The 'Brahma Sutra' series obviously inspired by the advaitic vision of Sankaracharya and Saiva-sakti cult, was done to begin with, over a brief span of four years from 1973 to 1976. In this series he declared that appearance is nothing but what is true is beyond the appearance.

Titles alone don't make a painting. Thus he is content in improvising on the same thereafter.

Haridasan's paintings are a visual delight. Though abstract, the colours used are haunting. His yellow and red have grades in them as that of birds, flowers or forest fires. His variations of blue range from the colours of the sea to the mountains against the sky. The shades of green vary from the green foiliages, the paddy fields and the coconut palms.

We can see that some of his motifs spring from the configurations of 'Kolam' and his metaphors are drawn from the psyche of Indian theism as concepts lent but transformed to suit modernist sensibilities.

The bilaterally symmetrical patterns with concentric ovals and floral motifs of his paintings seem to transport us to a sublime level. The oval of course is basically a tantric motif suggestive of Brahmananda. He is also innovative to the extent that all these fit into a pictorial idiom of his own.

Haridasan had once been quoted as saying Tantra was a practical approach to spirituality. It is a vision of life which created an art of pure line, fields of colour, rhythm and harmony in forms which are not there at the surface levels of Nature. It revealed a visionary abstract reality.

M.G. Sashibhooshan,
Professor,
Govt Victoria College, Palakkad, Kerala.

To digress, in ratiocinations... Haridasan

Indian culture was built as an edifice on Darshanas of Rishis (Visionaries). There was an ongoing interaction between them and the scholars who interpreted them, who contributed on their own to the original and established them as 'Shastras' and 'Upanishes'. Thus it is a storehouse of knowledge of all sorts. These foundations have still the strength and relevance to sustain ourselves with a distinction, in terms of their definition of reality with a possible spiritual content, as the scope for human evolution.

That was the time they were singing praises to Nature for the gift that was life. The unforeseen encounter later to follow, to a challenge to their very survival had made them vary and pusillanimous. We were forced to open new channels for our reflexes in our very system. Thus a redefinition of sorts (of reality) has entered in our psyche.

For instance, if we may confine ourselves to fine art, we gave up Ajanta and Thanjavur, and commencing from company school, the effort got perfected through Ravi Varma with its emphasis on verisimilitude, or similarly in literature the indulgence in objective analysis etc., thereby building walls against deeper perceptions. This process has commended, unobtrusively to adapt ourselves to alien moulds in life styles, shedding the skin for the sake of a garment. We have become ill equipped to go back to our ancient visionaries, deformed by neglect.

There is no intrinsic fault in conditioning ourselves to new systems, as most would contend and call it progress. One can concede that what is substituted has its strength to sustain us on an alternate face. But it would evidently be a futile exchange to give up the territory we already have for another and unknown or that, instead of integrating both. It would rather be like a choice between the being or its monument, instead of the being within the monument in celebration.

Modernity began with questioning which implies possibilities of denial too. The initial steps began with science and that suited its own function in society i.e., the process of analysis and invention. This had brought about a new found confidence of creating a New Era of Man posing to be the creator, defying God, the ancestors, the legacy. Denial has it been mostly as a means in favour of flaunting Egos.

Ideas have chain reactions and the same got extended to other disciplines, infecting even Art expression ad-infinitum, inevitably leading to shock tactics which consequently have displaced expression. Recent International Art history proves it. It is to be realised here that innovation is an alibi for hybridisation. So we are in the midst of a crisis of sorts in the nature of endless improvisations where it is stupefying to make distinctions of one against the other.

The havoc was brought about due to the mixed notions on functions of Art and Science in society. Art is to nurture the psyche and spirit through deeper perceptions not to dissect and disintegrate. To recover we need creative individuals to guard values, to maintain impeccable standards.

Turning to my works, the term 'Brahman' is not merely to cling to an old idea, but to connote the insurpassable enigma which that stands for, the all-inclusive expanse of immeasurable presence.

Just as the speed of light is the basic constant of physical dynamics, Brahman is meant to be the basic constant, being the 'ultimate' of experiences, of all kinds. Are they internal or external is for us to discover.

It is symbolised by Zero, '0' and by the sound 'cm' to mean 'purnam' the perfect and total, also described as 'Pujyam' meaning 'deserving worship'.

As a linguistic expression the term has a unique distinction.

All arts draws their compelling and persuasive qualities from this source of beatific intelligence.

Haridasan.

HARIDASAN. K.V.

b. Cannanore Dist., Kerala

ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

Graduated from Madras University

I Class Diploma in Painting, Govt. College of Arts & Crafts, Madras

National Cultural Scholar, Govt. of India

Training in Fresco Painting, Banasthali Rajasthan

EXHIBITIONS

National Exhibition of Art, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi

All Exhibitions sponsored by Cholamandal Artists Village, Madras, Progressive Painters Association, Madras, Young Painters Association, Madras

25 Years of Indian Art, Lalit Kala Akademi New Delhi

40 Artists of Madras, by the, British Council Madras

Special Invitee to the National Exhibition of Art, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS

Paris Biennale, PARIS

"Ten Modern Tantric Painters", at "Man & his world" Exhibition in Montreal, Canada

II International Triennale, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, India

IV International Triennale, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, India

V International Triennale, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, India

New Tantra, Exhibition at West Germany, Sponsored by the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, India

Group Exhibition of Indian Painters, Moscow, USSR

Neo Tantra Exhibition as a part of the Festival of India Programme Exhibition at the University of California, USA

'Tantra' Exhibition at Australia, (1986)

Asian Biennale, Bangladesh

Festival of India, Exhibition of Art, USSR

Special Invitee to the VI International Triennale, New Delhi, India

ONE MAN SHOWS

District Library Hall, Madras

Fine Arts Society, Calcutta

Triveni Gallery, New Delhi

'Yantra Series' British Council, Madras

'Yantra Series' & 'Yantra 69' both at Kumar Gallery, New Delhi

'Bija Yantra' Series, Kumar Gallery, New Delhi

'Brahma Sutra' Series, Lalit Kala Gallery, New Delhi

Metal Reliefs, Gallery Chanakya, New Delhi

'Brahma Sutra' Series, Kala Peetom, Cochin

ARTIST CAMPS

Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi,

Akademi's of Kerala, Kashmir and Madras

Tamil University Tanjore

International Artists Camp, India & GDR in Dummer, Schwerin, GDR

AWARDS

1964 Tamil Nadu Lalit Kala Akademi, Madras

1975 Award & Gold Medal, Kerala State Lalit Kala Akademi, Kerala

TRAVEL

1974 Visited USSR, GDR under Cultural Exchange Programme, Govt. of India

1975 Travelled in France & Switzerland

1983 Visited France under a French Scholarship to work in Graphics

DISTINCTIONS

1979 - 1985 Editor, 'Art Trends' Art Magazine of the Progressive Painters Association, Cholamandal, Madras.

1980 - 1988 Professor & Head of the Dept. of Painting College of Fine Arts, Trivandrum, Kerala

1986 Produced to telecast a Telefilm on "Modern Art" for MCRC under UGC Programme

1989 Principal, College of Fine Arts, Trivandrum

1989 - 1991 Member, Central Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, its publication committee and Regional Centre, Madras Member Executive, Kerala Lalit Kala Akademi, Kerala

1981 - 1992 Member of the Jury, National Exhibition of Art Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi

COLLECTIONS

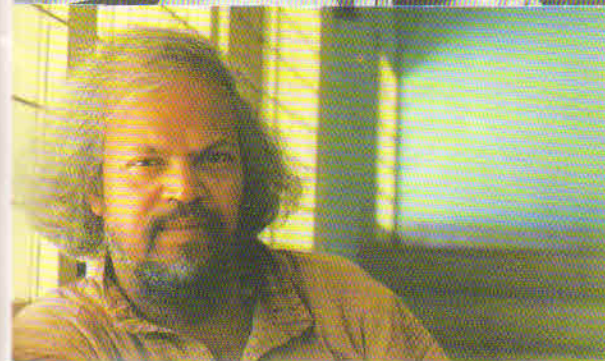
National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Central Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi - Andhrapradesh Lalit Kala Akademi, Hyderabad - Karnataka Lalit Kala Akademi, Bangalore - Sri Chitralayam Art Gallery, Kerala - India Tourism Development Corporation, New Delhi - Colour Chem India Pvt. Ltd. Bombay - National Art Gallery, Madras - Kashmir Arts Akademi, Srinagar - other private & public collections in India and abroad.

Address:

Prof. K.V. Haridasan
TC/9/1222, Sastamangalam
Trivandrum - 695 010
India

Permenant Address:

K.V. Haridasan
Cholamandal Artists Village
Injambakkam
Madras 600 041
India





Nirvriti Yantra

1975

COMMENTS

Haridasan's Brahma Sutra series great

Of exceptionally high quality were the paintings by Haridasan shown at Rabindra Bhavan. They were claimed as symbolic notations of transcendental reality. This would not be obvious to the unilluminated, and in any case would be arguable since Haridasan's own arguments drifts towards the geometrical structure behind sensuous reality and die-hard Mayavadins are prepared to reject the skeletal armature along with the mantle of flesh. But Malevich, Mondrian and others have found basic geometrical forms rich stimuli for contemplation and Haridasan's yield is perhaps richer.

Haridasan tempers the rigour of rectilinear forms with judicious blending of the curvilinear. The forms are not flat, but excavate virtual space in projections and recessions. They are not static, for spirals climb upwards with slow or fast momentum, the spires of serrated triangles thrust like the spikes of a Macedonian phalanx.

The values of optical art are also gained by the play of perspective in the arrangement of horizontal striations, by the overlay of laminated planes of colours. The colours have been chosen with supreme judgement and are applied without modulation or impasto, singing out like musical notes of extreme purity. This is a chaste, orderly, highly finished art which has managed to reveal that the pure geometrical form has its own richness and sensuous beauty.

— Krishna Chaitanya

The Hindustan Times Weekly, January 1977, New Delhi

An exhibition of high order

On the theme of the Brahma Sutra, K V Haridasan presents a fine repertoire of symbols, sign and motifs which are both archetypal and "avant garde".

Esoteric in appearance but built up with clear panel of sectional imagery which are of stellar, floral or trefoil motifs, set in squares or ovoids, the paintings derive their moving force both from a symmetrical arrangement as well as from subtle variations within the compositors.

In many of these paintings Haridasan proves that the structure of design and colour carries inevitably a forming, live line which gives each motif, and their combinations, a specific rhythm.

Haridasan adopts the principle "A search for an order which is seemingly not there" in expounding the Brahma Sutra theme and in making this series. He establishes this sense of order with the use of very considered, formal colour which is cool but lucid. These quiet, placid and almost neutral fields of colour emphasise the beauty of lines and curves of shapes and motifs, in terms of their formal relations. In another mode of composition an arabesque of curves suggests phenomenal power as it flows, like flames of waves, within an ovoid. Set in this and circulated by this force are germinal, nuclei formations.

These are among Haridasan's simpler works. Their austerity and directness are amazingly effective visually. Pictorially simple and



Maha Yantra

1968

effortlessly made they strike the spectator nevertheless as being symbolic. More complex in structure in a few works Haridasan juxtaposes perspectives and planes creating a frame-work which sets off the symbolic forms.

An exhibition of high order that presents an abstract theme in visually live imagery.

Richard Bartholomew

The Times of India, December 1976, New Delhi

It's Brahma Sutra this time

Haridasan's Brahma Sutra series of paintings, on view at the Lalit Kala Gallery, are perhaps as pregnant with meaning as Badrayan's celebrated treatise of the same name. And that much honed and esoteric too.

It is a huge show with 18 oils, 9 acrylics and 12 water colours. It is like a journey across trillions of planets and millenniums of time. It is also a splash of colours and an acrobatics of geometric designs. On the more mundane level, it is a decoration with a flair for inventiveness and effect. Brahma Sutra is the ontological study of the self and the super-self, with generous recourse to symbols and metaphors. Haridasan's paintings, following the literal pictorial interpretation of the scripture, gives the symbols design and structure that is entirely his, uniquely his. His ingenuity is not to be sought in the metaphysics of symbols but in their renderings in the tight compositions of space and subtle variations of colour.

The one who cannot do so would return from the exhibition a disappointed man.

Ratna Dhar Jha

Morning Echo, December 1976, New Delhi

Visually pleasing and enduring work of art. Haridasan carefully built up pictographic symbol gives expression to ideas of energy and of genesis... the entire concept is the result of a sensibility which owes as much to tradition as to contemporary outlook.

S A Krishnan

Statesman, April 1971, New Delhi

Not many painters, unless they are highly gifted, can give such convincing performance, because what surprises most is the newness in Haridasan... we just could not dismiss him lightly or his Yantra gimmicks which are pure Haridasan innovations. One thing that strikes immediately on entering the gallery is that these paintings are a visual treat. So imaginatively these two forms – geometric and non geometric – are woven into the overall pattern that we hardly notice them separately. Every shape has its counterpart, it is repeated and it's possible variations suggested either in a single painting or in more than one.

B D Goel

Link, November 1969, New Delhi

'Madhyans Surya Yantra', 'Bija Yantra', 'Jyothir Yantra' – so run the titles of the 15 paintings by Haridasan... without an exception they make a body of well thought out, competent compositions, made up of dia-grammatical geometrical units, latus blooms, and similar foliated motifs...

S A Krishnan

Statesman, November 1969 New Delhi

Patterns repatterned of flame, flowers, root, seed, is the way Haridasan's Yantra series goes. It is a virtual necklace of symbols... and it is certainly a climb upwards from his earlier work... The goodness in them, for me, seems of design, not of the purported occult or esoteric, that only keep you guessing... as with 'Moha', with its minute Miro traces, despite the fixedness of the total composition. Thus there is pleasure here, of pure seeing. Many of the works guarantee it.

Keshav Mallik
Hindustan Times, November 1969, New Delhi

Tantrik art is of course, a serious proposition as much as African Sculpture was with Picasso and Derain in the beginning of the century or as the Japanese prints were with the impressionists towards the close of the 19th century.

Haridasan uses the Tantra symbology, transforming it into an evocative space pattern. So a combination of Tantrik compositional logic, Kleeian distortions and space geometry methods make a new style for Haridasan. A comparison between Haridasan's 'Bhoga' and 'Samsara' will show how difficult it is to compose Tantrik art using the same set of symbols, but varying the formal properties... much painterly skill goes into Haridasan's compositions.

B D Goel
Link, March 1969, New Delhi

Haridasan is a competent young painter with some bright ideas on how to be avant-garde... These Yantras or diagrams that house the spirit of mantra of the Tantras... comprising the profile face, the sign of the double, the ligam yoni complement, the off Yab-Yum figure, the waves of flame and lotus... naturally in esoteric paintings the symbol is further defined and isolated and made to be magical in relation to the volume of colour and the magnitude of the archetypal implications...

Haridasan is not unaware of this principle for his whole effort is directed towards making colour carry the implications of the symbology. In this he has an instinct for the right colour scheme. The Yantras so-called are superior to their outline genesis.

Richard Bartholomew
Times of India, March 1969, New Delhi

In his works now on exhibition at the British Council Haridasan has broken away from... to try something entirely new. In the Yantra series - of which 15 are on view - he uses archetypal symbols, birds, fire, tree... the colours are vivid reds, purples, blues... This along with the resonance of these mystical shapes make most of the paintings extremely striking at first sight.

Another quality which such paintings demand is precision. For any sign of casualness or uncertainty at once disturbs the objectivity and the 'escape from personality' aimed at...

Girish Karnad
Indian Express, December 1968, Madras

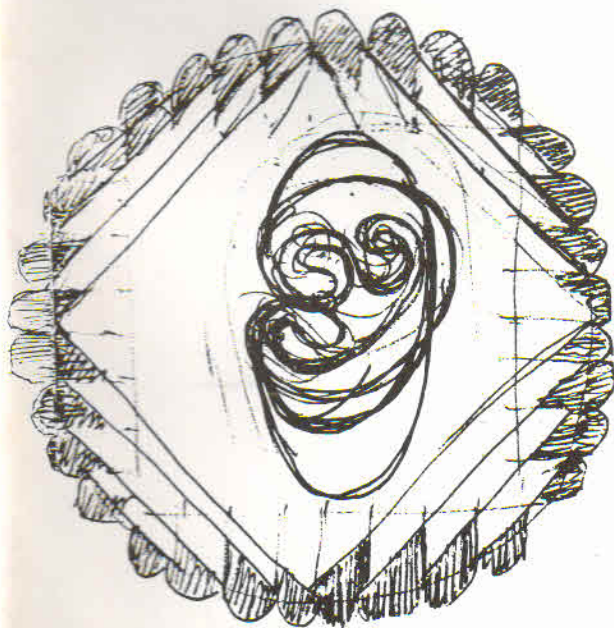
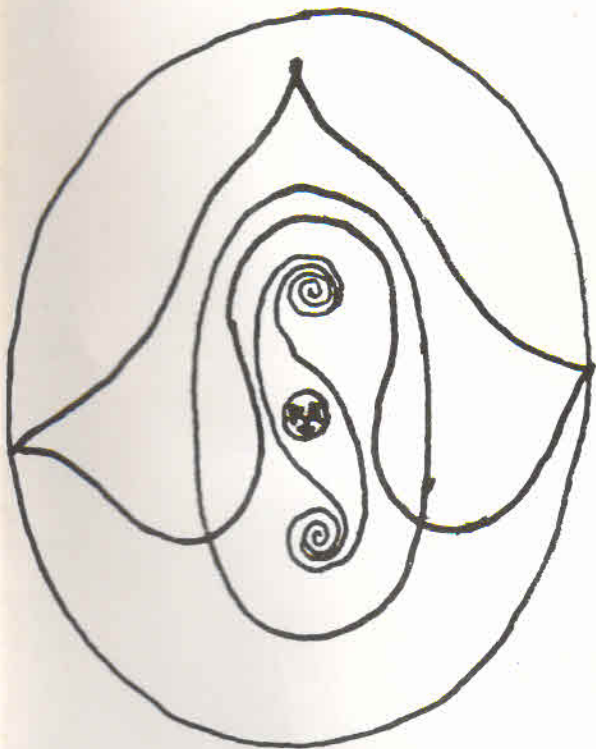
Haridasan is one of the Indian Artists responsible for creating the 'Tantric trend' in modern Indian Art. He has, however, used a lot of freedom to express this ancient Art in modern terms...

A suggestion of a face, something like a flame, the concept of Siva, the illuminated personality, appear now and then lending subjective content to an otherwise symbolic Art.

Anjali Sircar
The Hindu, March 1979, Madras

The meticulous handling, euphoric tonal quality and overall intuitive truth of the content, elevate his works to sacredness:

J Sultan Ali
Arts and Crafts - March, 1984



Brahma Sura 1974

YOU ARE CORDIALLY
INVITED.