

intimations

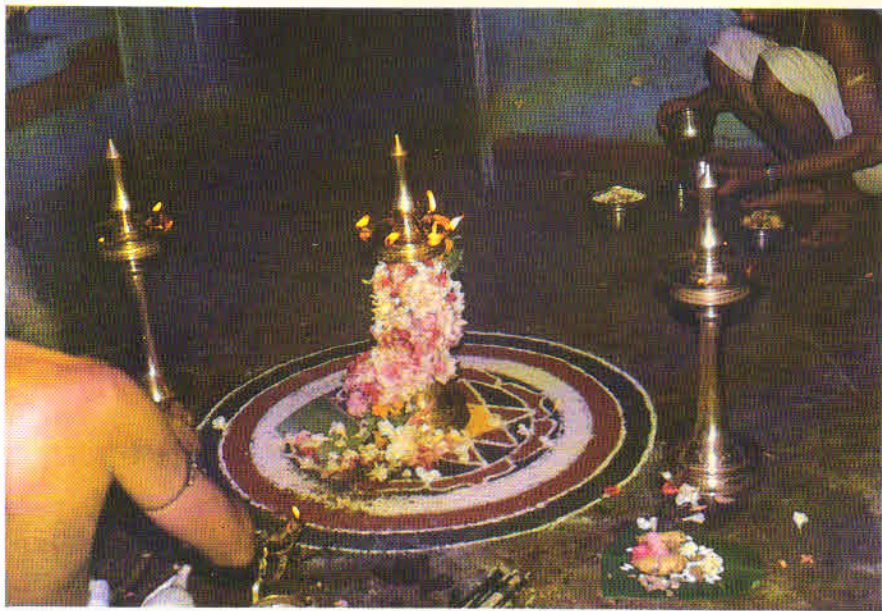


on Art -
Indian,
Western,
Modernity,
Tradition
& Tantra

H A R I D A S A N

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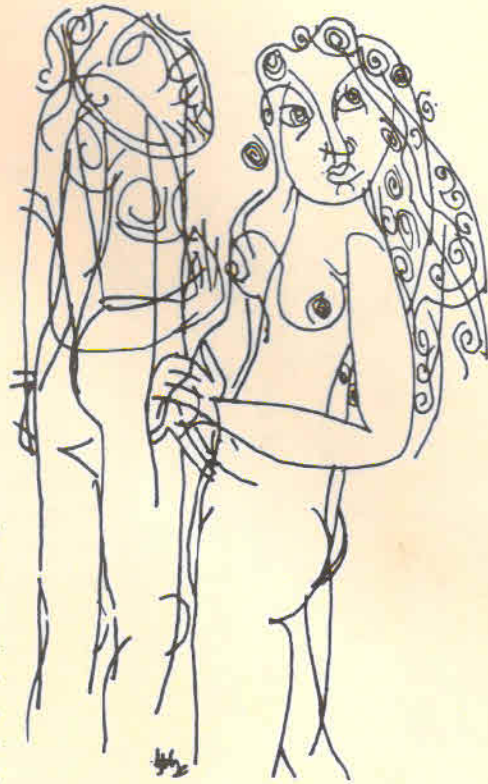
This is an effort to provide the emergent Indian Art a perspective it does not have and yet is generally assumed that it has, due to our colonial legacy and the resultant outlook, an outlook so deterministic and circumscribed by the dictates of a world over-awed by the logico-scientific systems of thought, which has become so pervasive.

So contrary to prevalent views I am presenting a postulate that Modern Art of the West has taken a direction, not in consonance, not arm in arm, with the advancement of Science implying progress through its magic wand, but towards the realms of subjectivity through assimilations of the (non-scientific) visions of extra European traditions, and which during the process of its growth and expansion or assessment, has not been properly acknowledged. The logical extension of that fact is of great significance to us in India towards instilling confidence in the maintenance and continuance of such of those artistic traditions (on which we ourselves are not sufficiently aware of as assets and thereby neither are we concerned).

It is not my intention to denounce any person or trends in the Art field but only in enquiring into the challenges of a profession which may yet actually be at variance with the prevalent and assumed notions and that are seen manifested in its various guises professionally. I wish that the skeletal references to numerous issues related to Art would provoke others to probe further.

HARIDASAN

Among the creative fields which constitute Culture of human society, the licence to flout rules of the game has been gained the earliest in Visual Art by the predecessors among those who created the Modern art movements. Every aspect of it has been questioned, conventions reviewed and its structures, methodology and techniques, step by step, dismantled and fitted back again, that, for the common lot, works of that genre appears now displaced, even to the extent, to say, to make it look mind boggling, almost aberrational.



What immediately comes to mind that brought about this state of affairs are, works of Van Gogh, Picasso, Matisse, Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Malevitch, Duchamp, Pollock, Du-Buffet significantly and many more.

What has emerged through Modern Art is an expansion in the scope and the extent, of artistic expression, including the sowing of the seeds of rebellion against the premises on which traditional western Art was founded. They, Modernists, sidelined the naturalistic conventions altogether with the acceptance and recognition of all extra-European, including oriental, manners of Art-expressions. The result has been thoroughly tantalising, an array (of works) in acknowledgement of all cultures the world over, resulting in cultural unification of a kind. This implies the west was at the receiving end, yet the socially demoralised colonies, such as ours, simulate, vicariously the same throes in the name of Art, products of which were at best superfluous.



Art of earlier ages were accessible only to a limited geographical area. That was verily the regions soul, their charecteristic expression, through which they could be identified. Now all those are beeing assimilated in cross ventilation over the world but only proportionate to the dominating means of the communication media. Those who wields that power determines the kind of Art that is propogated pervasively and thereby persuades the masses in that direction. So, it is all the more necessary to hold fast on to whatever distinct features we have inherited as assets in our culture, to stall yet further impoverishment.

What follows, in here, is an attempt at taking stock, what has been gained in exchange, what has been lost.

Modernity began with questionining which implies possibilities of rejection too. The initial steps began with Science and that suited its own function in Society i.e., the process of analisis 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. Rejection has it been mostly as a means in favour of flaunting Egos.

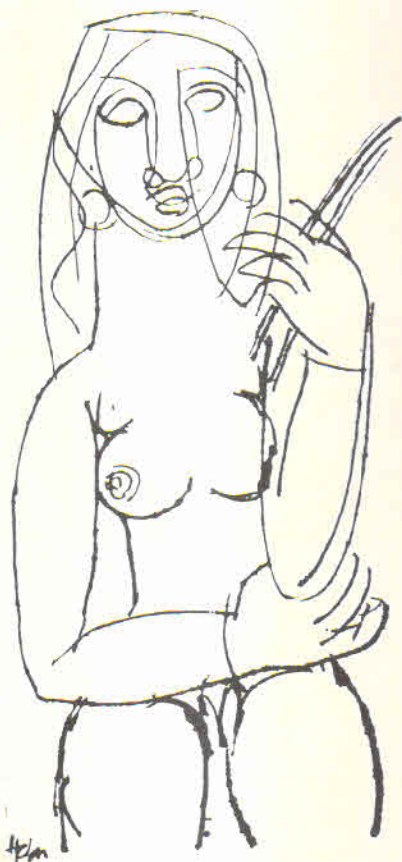
Ideas have Chain reactions and those same got extended to other disciplines, infecting even Art expression, ad-infinity, inevitably leading to shock tactics which consequently have displaced Expression. Recent International Art history proves it. It is to be realised here that innovation was an alibi 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 distinction of one against the other.

The havoc was brought about due to the mixed notions on the 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.



Under the glossy veneer of individuality of the Artist, we can yet discern that any one set of painters conform to a mode, while another do so to another, may be abstract, expressionistic, social commitment, lyrical, traditional, realistic and so on. Most can be labelled under broad categories, that is inclusive of even certain of the grand Masters known to the world so far, who in their turn had also derived their idiom from distant ethnic resources, some of which were non-individualistic to boot i.e. Picasso and African Art, Gauguin and Tahiti and some others. So claims of individuality turns hollow and the net result turns out to be a certain intellectual vitality emerging out of a new born idealism and hope. Here, there is an evident disparity between the pretensions and their reality. The motivating urge for this duplicity boils down to the need for social acceptance or earning recognition. But unless one has a path paved with the resources towards generating one's own mind will have to inevitably employ others ideas. A body of work emerges as a result but more as a process of vicarious assimilation.



The renaissance tradition of Art of the western world perfected the technique of registering the visual field, limited to what the sense organ can absorb, where the mind of Man had to succumb to the dictates of its limited perceptions. No less (of laborious discipline) and no more (of vision). Thus they created Gods in human form.

Traditionally in India artists went on a frenzy of visionary exuberance in elaborating and extending unbridled fantasies and so perceived humans as 'lila' or pranks of gods. Technically they distilled psychological states graphically. They were created on pre-conceived principles of transcendence and as such has become alien to the contemporary lot already. The great temples and murals stand testimony to this.

An operational, communicable via-media of a stable ground, by knowing, reaching to a scale, of possible range in artistic expressions has been arrived at only now, after the encounters for a few centuries, in this modern period when both sides happened to compare notes. The only relief is that the exercises at a unification has not been futile, although the pains at reaching it has been as worst as a historical trauma.

But one thing we yet have to find an answer to, i.e. why the modern Indian bends over backwards to impress the world that we know others cultures better than themselves, ignoring our own, at the expense and sometimes by the desecration of our own.

Ever since the western world, created the language of verisimilitude for making the image of humans and nature, the tale has taken a new turn, as that defined his day to day existence in which he has to function and interact. So also the common denominator of judging art had to be revised so as to begin form realism. For the earlier ages of isolated cultures, for each of them, there was a communicable language of art of their own with their distinct qualities. They were creatively bred and nourished by that language and that was the notations of their existence, may it be, for instance, that of Egypt, Africa, Maya, Japanese or our own. But in the twentieth century, confronted with the compelling strength and genius of such ethnic diversity over the world, the west itself was impelled to discover nuances in art which can express his spiritual self by overcoming limitations of realism. This was the most significant step in art in the 20th century namely, the modern trends. This observation can circumscribe all of pre-renaissance and recent post-naturalistic movements of art that emerged in west, while human's in its commonality identifies with naturalism in communication. So the persistant dichotomy in appreciation and maintenance of quality in Art.

Instead of discourging the indulgence in singing praises of naturalism with which people can go on for ever, humans develop almost a craving to project all their finer sentiments on to what they are capable of understanding as Art, that which is limited to the unfamiliar, unknown expanses being challenging. Thereby aesthetic evolution itself is stalled.





At one stretch, to day, the knowledgables on Art declare that a Michealangelo and a Paul Klee are both masters, although both are evidently far distant and incomprehensible stylistically from each other. What is it that resolves this paradox i.e. mutually opposing tendencies which they are rationally trained to defend each from opposing points of view through their own interpretations, explanations of historical contexts and finally compositional analysis that both are made relevent for to-days pluralistic social set-up. With that great range of cultivated nuances of sentiments, responses, the discerning viewer, more so the Artists, yet have to, as individuals, with strong mental inclinations make a choice among these two, through a silent resolution. Here at this point we are being lead by our conscience to classify them, one as representing superficial reality while the other as psychic so as to assert ones own norms, leading to a stage, in the process of judgement, where, we have to define what is real Art, while the other becomes a class apart and less so. That is the inevitable point of involvement, that which people rarely wants to commit to.

Experiences determines the limits of perception leading to Faith that in turn determines conviction. When one employs reason to convince, one is conceding the validity of an equally opposed stream of reasoning too as valid which in effect amounts to having the best means of confounding the mind. The process can also go on endlessly.



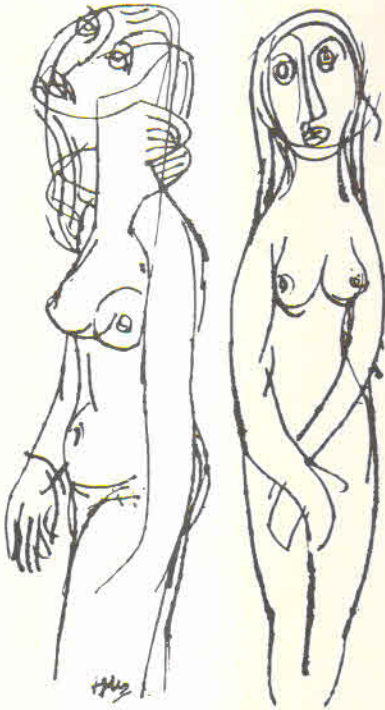
We need at times to be an agnostic and suspend our judgement so as to make ourselves free from dependence on belief, as Time on its course, can distort the relevance of mores. Yet not to have any terms of reference to the values already realised is a loss that will eventually be regretted. Traditional values are not to be dismissed but to be revalued.

The course of this world, is directed through a string of a few ideas.

This is an age of challenges in ideas, ideas get worn, as apparels, a new one is substituted if one worn is soiled, so the freshness is maintained, thereby the camouflage. But those which matter are few, value based, unalterable, often the same, but realised!

Ideas dissolve in the mind. Those who provide ideas cannot claim ownership to it, while those who receive and absorb them cannot differentiate it separately from his own, once he has partaken of it, in his mind, which is a repository of ideas and refuses to acknowledge their source, as ideas are the most precious and potent generator of actions. So everyone illegitimately tries to own them without realizing the "sadhana" put into it to get it out of intelligence.

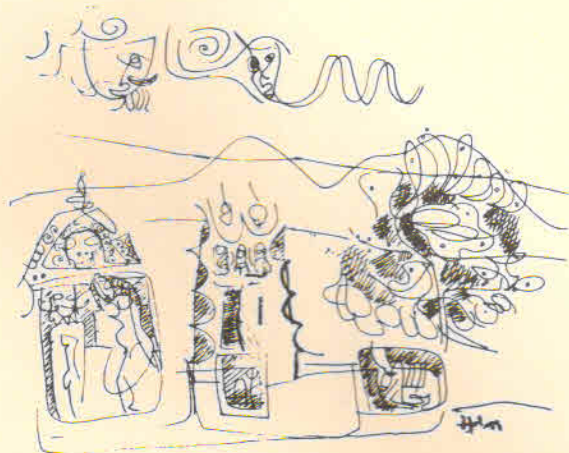
It is only during the last few decades that the idea of individual's Right to be treated equally, slowly gained ground in our land. This has been established by the west on their own grounds of scientific observation as the final basis of estimating Humans, each one of them as equal among themselves, but superior among other organisms found, in Nature. Yet the finer faculties were not weighed with the term



'individual' in favour of the 'human' in this scale, as finer qualities of the mind are invisible, as also they are all the more ephemereral.

Because of it, by now, Equality has become synonymous with Individuality that has been stretched to such an extent that each has become an unassailable island or fortress by itself claiming supremacy of achievement, the worst affected being the Visual Art, with their impulsive defiance, so that, to question any is to find the other double up in defence. So common grounds of communication in creative field are rarely achieved which can seep into the society. Each gets tragically moored into their own blind alleys.

Mind is the original tool of man. But as often as he uses it, man also struggles with it, as a liability. But one cannot wish it away. It is a burden of encapsulated millenia. From the common mans bewildering angle, he has to struggle within its confusing confines. Socially, for those who are better endowed with larger scope for application of it (mind) has a developed, often sophisticated, self-esteem (ego) which he wants to project, and he does so armed with its (mind's) spikes. It is a game not different from sport of one kind or the other people usually play. There is a limit to the extent one can continue playing it without getting weary. Weariness sets in as friends and loved ones pass off, desolation due to failure, trying circumstances, reversals of fortune turn on in vicious circles and by which time Mind has become a rut, the predecament has become mind boggling, it fails and makes a knot



of ones life. All the treatese, researches, formula one evolves are no differant than a swim in egoism's vital fluid, seemingly playful, in which, at the final juncture, one has to drown in.

In a country as that of ours where rigourous discipline was once maintained in training of the arts, when that got challenged by foreign domination and demolished and the system got demoralised, starved of patronage, the table got turned. The tide has turned into a free for all in flouting norms, which now displays an unforeseen anarchy. Innovation, creativity, originality added with persistant effort were once, in its state of inception, of Modern Art movements, believed desirable in the pursuit of art. To make the situation confoundingly worse, the public is trained only to the extant of comprehending Contemporary Art as something non-communicative, so that when it comes to patronage the choice is automatic and as can be expected in favour of whatever is incomprehensible. Accordingly, that particular mode, regardless of any rationale, spreads like forest fire.

Due to the Demands of consumer publicity, application of Art has become extensive and profitable, so that the sense of wonder and the magic of Art is lost sight of. Art as a resourse that generate wonder within oneself, gets overlooked and by which Man is bereft of nourishment that elvates his spirit, resulting in distorted evolution of his bearing.



On the premise that social regeneration is through interaction among individuals and applying that dictum to visual Art, we can find that Artists react to other artist's work by a resultant work of ones own, while people in general react through words, being of universal currency. So the language of Painting has always been, and is all the more so at present, incomprehensible to people in its depth and intensity.

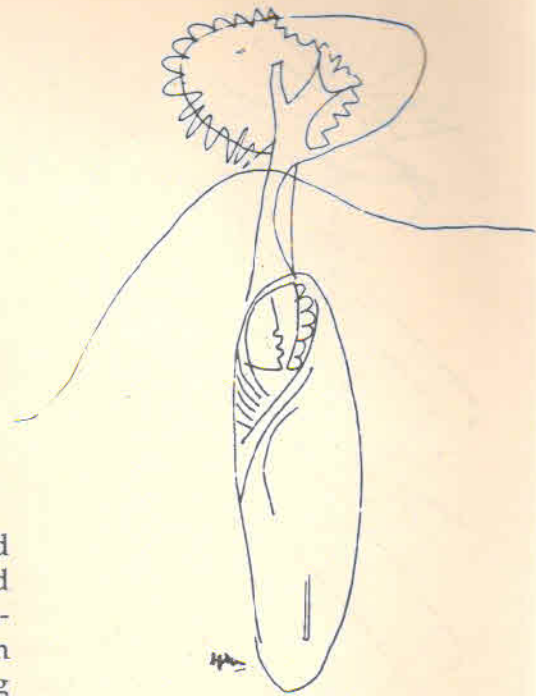
But among professional artists the matter is different. Just as water tends to keep its even level by the process of flowing, mind tend to absorb ideas of others in most people's cases (rather ideas also flow into each other's mind, when there is no will to resist it). Thereby artistic growth is always confined within the closed circuit of professionals. So interdependence on ideas are common among them.

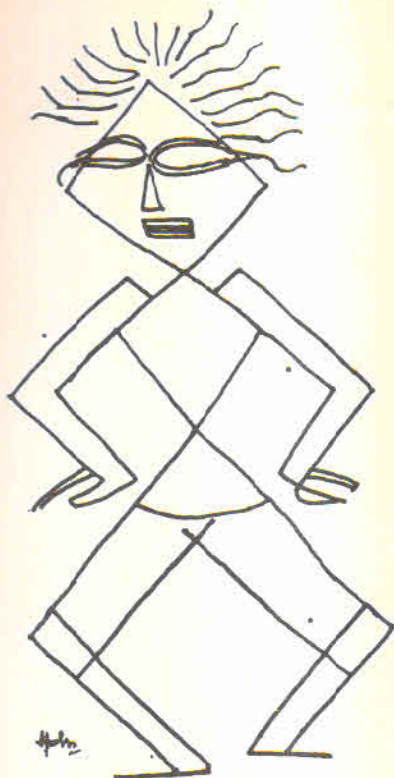
So a willful thrust of better Artist is easily taken up by others. This is how a trend sets in and holds on yet deeper, often extensively, through their associated verbal jargon emerging as critical literature which helps to register into the sentiments of people and attaches to them. So false claims and illusory images are no bar on the process. To set it right is to dedicate oneself for the cause.

The demands of mass taste on one side, dissipation of ones creative urges through social pressures in maintaining oneself on the other, compounded with lack of will to go further from the level already achieved, makes an Artist repeat himself. That induces the market to dictate the terms where the Artist had once the say. Thereby, paradoxically, success becomes creatively the most boring situation.

India is a conglomerate of cultural units transformed out of one basic source yet parts of it are far removed to remain identical to another in cultural manifestations. A long stretch of colonialism has made them even to vie with each other. Human limitations being such that cannot be wished away, such traits can't easily fade off. Modernity is being carried on not within a natural force of circumstances. So there has been no concomittant disciplines acquired as infrastructural base, neither the dedication towards achieving an unbiased rationale on art criticism, in spite of rare exceptions. The basic inclinations of Indians for fancy still holds ground is proved in the great range with works of every nuance in the Art horizon, from imitations to individual predilections, and that much confounding to estimate, to say the least.

To begin with there seems to be an ingrained lack of pride in the national genius, (where-from modernity could have learned a few lessons such as its innate creative exuberance), not to say ever asserting this as a possible asset anywhere, among all the paraphernalia in the name of Art. One finds only those easily swayed by colonially bred habits of thinking. The very means of approach to artistic disciplines have been cut to foreign vistas. Even the very rationale of existence seems to be compared, exercised, translated, and transcribed to foreigner's measures. The insight and the necessary will to differentiate culture from pragmatic reaches of day to day life, seems to have been lost. So a discriminative norms of judgement is lost sight of, a multitude of angles of view are in circulation but no perspective from our innate standpoint is inculcated, Coomaraswamy is in the wilderness of bookshelves.

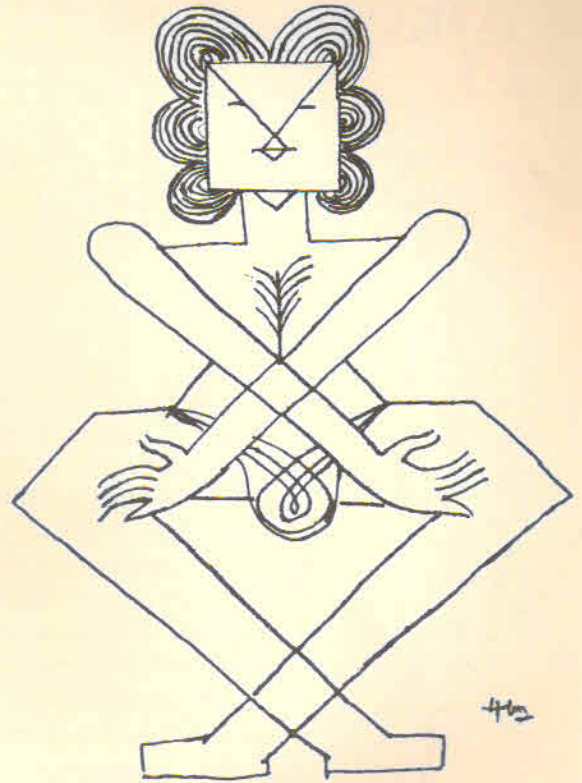




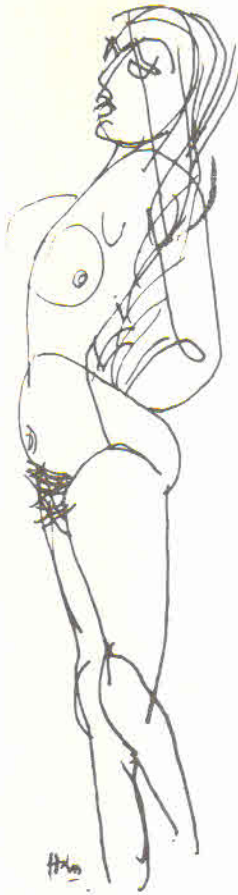
Taken unawares, confronting a fresh piece of art, of any form, at any levels, any among common man or child, is no different, in succumbing to the confrontation, and they either laments or if turned on, showers praises without being aware of the immediate context in which it was created. He is, in fact, either stupified or simply baffled. That much is the possessive power of the medium, which is capable of conducting any amount of power according to the subjects cultured internal resources. But it is always the resources that vary. The cofusion starts when the subject's acquired culture is resistant to fresh insights. It becomes all the more confounding if the acquired culture is in another medium, say, of music or writing etc, when, the responses become intense enough, with a vehemence in praise or denouncement what he sees, all the more.

If one reflects on life and take stock of it in comparison with our fellowbeings, one would be put off to see that joy is something which "would have been" for most and not that which has been ever derived in their ever-continuing present, i.e., one ever gets hold of. (if there ever can be an honest estimation). That's how an urge, the need and the craving for its redressal is carried forward as the motivation, the quest, in trials and errors, in shifting of occupations, in shuffling the forms of entertainment, diversions through hobbys, until one may reach at one's tether-end; the quest has to continue probably in the following births, a mission by itself to reach at the very source of one's motivations, the quest is leading unawares to the final wellsprings.

The universal consumption of liquor and drugs proves that without the help of a sedative, most people are unable to manage their own mind, for which, paradoxically, one's whole energy was, once, during one's early childhood consistently put to develop, had oriented one's very being. The paradox!



Tragedy and fear are twin brothers. The constant empathy towards tragedy makes one sympathise with those who undergo tragic situations along with themselves, as that is the reality of life in most cases. As one gets used to it, when once that is ever missed they tend to create it to fill the vacuum not otherwise filled. For such people, joy remains only a hope for the future. So, tragedy and its expression through art has more of a hold on the minds of people. Similar to the merciful benign tresses of a tree, rather than seeking unsteady shelter from a sweltering Sun under passing clouds, during one's struggles and tribulations, joys of a more permanent kind is a possible state of mind that could be achieved. The sages are known to have reached it. Social beings, as most humans are, only conceive of such a state of being in their imagination, as day-dreams, possibly, for attainment in their prospective future, as prophesised by Marx, while he himself failed to reach it. So evidently such ideologies or in other words prospective visions are presumptions which couldn't have been realised; as the state of the mind of individuals who constitute a society, are at a given moment individually different from each to the others and at varying level of growth; their motivations as also capabilities



vary. (That was why Dharma was once prophesied to be of crucial relevance for regulating action and behaviour in a society).

The progress we in this age assume as having had since a hundred years, is only in the regulations and augmentation of conveniences at the physical level of our existence achieved through the accepted methods of analytical observation and by evolving aids through restructuring the components on those observations, disregarding the spiritual side of human personality, even being oblivious of it mostly. Applied psychology of the modern kind has evolved only up to the level of toeing the charted line of assumptions made by the all-powerful physical sciences.

Humans to-day have become one unit, more accessible, as a consequence, globally. Yet in spite of the acquired organisational efficiency, the fall of communism still proves, that Humans can't regulate their own welfare in totality but by recognising human motivations which has its source in ego-expressions which includes domination, taking cues found in their own unequally endowed potentials.

Life is a field for the exercise of faculties (they emerge in the forms of reactions instantly, not through preconceptions) and through which one evolves within mentally, spiritually. If that scope is denied through human life, nature intent on its own designs, on its own decree, will set it right, irreconcilably.

All living spirits have in common an urge or drive and acquire mobility towards achieving something for themselves. Achieving perfection, that too at every possible level, Omniscience, can be spelt as the highest in qualities of motivation. That takes shape through refin-



ing oneself, achieving strength, not in brawn, but in gaining accessibility into unknown areas of knowledge and operational ability, through transparency, subtlety and Intelligence. Circumstantially confined social beings maintain the notion that the spirits that manifest as living beings (personality) appear and disappear with no inbuilt motivations.

Behaviourist notions coupled with the propagation of the New-found concept of freedom and its unbridled application, as a right, by all, has brought about this reversal from traditional orientations of society.

If one may trespass into the realms of the occult to lend credence to the above observation, let us presume that those who have achieved liberation as spirits have no more bondages here so as to come back, and so those that succeed them are lesser beings in their previous births who had earned their status to be humans through their former deeds, as a reward. As freshers and novices they would naturally be cast to begin at the lowest rung among others more advanced. Karma, this way, need to be treated as the process of evolution. So the standards of existence are bound to continue descending yet further downwards, sub-standard, against the utopian urges, visions and ideals of mankind. So a superior world order, if at all envisaged, cannot sustain itself here and is bound to be shattered. But the urge at all costs has to be maintained, as a ring of defence, to protect the evolved, the motivations to be acted upon at the available state of one's being.

Science has led us to believe, so far, a la Darwin, that evolution is continuous and successive and Man's struggles are steps to progress in that direction. Here we reach at two different approaches to the idea of evolution. There seems to have had stagenancies, when we take into account the fixed state in which most of the known biological species maintain themselves. All humans don't seem to evolve alike or equally



well. Neither does prosperity seem to undeniably bring contentment or even refinement or any physical deviations for the better. So we are here to conclude that consumer prosperity is misconceived as progress for the whole of Humanity, as also evolution is found neither as continuous nor rapidly and successively rising to higher levels physically.

So evolution is bound to be more or less at similar levels in each generation within a mean life-span of a set of the populace, but the situation turns immensely complex inevitably, as Times brings about changes, the context and parametres of measures automatically vary for each successive generations. The social and phisical evolution already achieved is at variance with the needs of the emerging generation who are to begin from scratch. So 'confrontation' is bound to be the name of the game. So the generation gap, the tragic dead-end of blind struggle until the aim is spelt from within for each individually!

It is inbuilt in the process of life, achieved through the different stages of life such as childhood, youth, adulthood that knowledge of various kinds has to be acquired, as social life becomes more and more complex. That knowledge, to a large extent has been recorded through posterity and is available as defined by our precursors in ancestry. They either get confirmed or defied by observation and experience by oneself within ones span of life. But recorded knowledge is more often found impractical, new circumstances having deviated from old and thereby got out of date. Yet rationality of mind develops out of such an exercise of the application of recorded knowledge. Most of mankind expects that problems could be solved by means of that, yet predicaments arise where that wouldn't suffice, demanding extra insight. That calls for determination to reach at



the ultimate end of the problem with which the crisis gets transformed, in terms of a solution, which emerge as if from nowhere. This is the point where a larger, intuitive reservoir of knowledge is sought after which has yet depths to be fathomed, which helps one to link up all aspects of the situation, integrational in its nature. So what we find here evidently are two different stages in the process of acquiring knowledge. When the rational ground available until now is found to be barren, one shouldn't be found wanting in an alternative means of finding solutions. Inclination towards the creative ventures as in fine arts can guide us to the latter, being inspirational by its nature, involving empathy.

There are beings in Nature at a variety of levels beginning at microbial and bio-rhythmic, functioning purely on instinct, and ranging from insects to beings which can move in air and water and the staggering variety of animals. When those got presumably evolved to the level of Human species, they are yet again differentiated as irrational, less rational and above all, on top of the pyramid, the rational yet intuitive humans. This is a great range of beings, as they manifest in numbers, in human scale of computation, although cosmically, say, as against the numbers of stars, still inconsequential.

There was once a staus-quo between these beings, mutual caution and cyclic interdependance, conscious of each others potentials. Man assuming himself as the best of the species, having acquired the knowhow of employing animals, using of plants for food, and once losing, once winning battles with microbes, arriving victorions with medicines, he found this made-to-order situation a benediction and all of it a devine dispensation. Yet further on, the rational, scientific man,

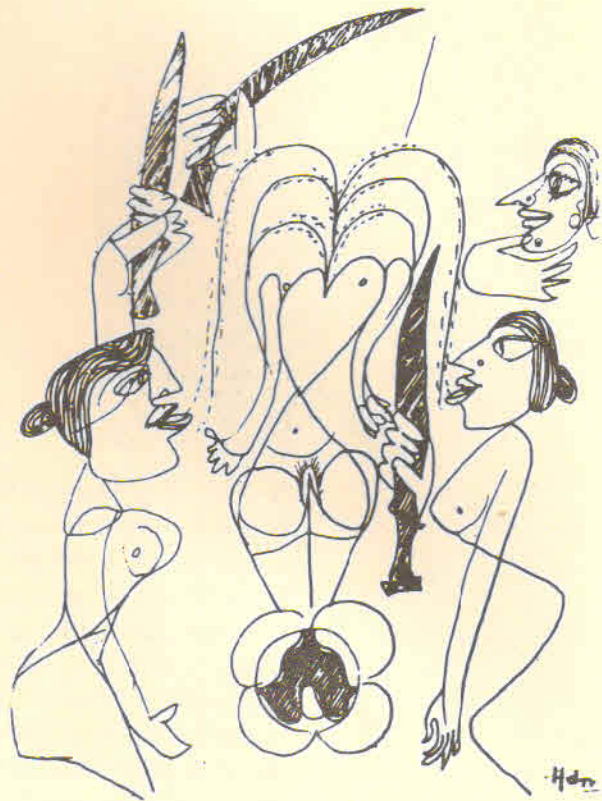


with his technology has razed to ground the edifice, torn to tatters this skillfully woven cocoon by his whims and fancies. Nature had planned an interdependence so precarious, executed so skillfully, as a scheme of an overawing Intelligence.

Probably now is the time for the disintegration of the planet and that explains how devotion of Man towards Nature has given place to manipulations of it on the basis of an analitical, atomic structuralism of modern science. Earth is being broken to bits, toxic materials getting strewn all over, aggressiveness i.e. fight for rights instead of tolerance, defiance has become the dominant character of Man. Beauty and adoration has become alien concepts, instead 'Facts' is being equated to all these ideals put together. Facts to serve personal ends, to puff up his ego and exclaim 'I have done this'.

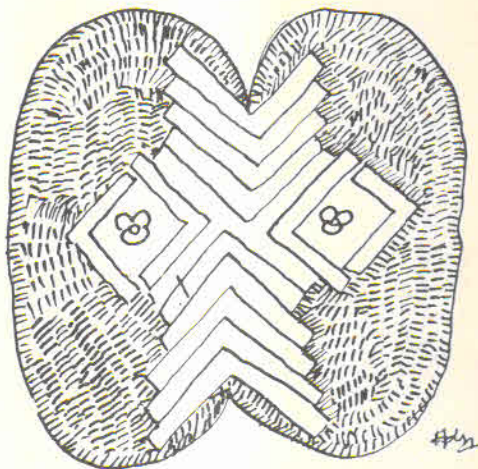
Arts originated for their theraputic function from the very inception of the tribal state of human society. Then it served both the individual Artists themselves and through them, the Society. It got accepted justifiably as serving ends at an unspecified area of social consciousness, yet of primary importance. Through the ages the Artist has been swinging on a pendulam of sorts serving the establishment or voicing rebellion for the sake of Values of the Society. But by 20th century, there has come a shift, the aims of it getting bifurcated, creative urge pitted against success and social acceptance. An age has emerged where the original magic of art in its motivational power got throughly rationalised and contained.

There was an age when Man used to be overawed by Nature, in its elemental powers, the unyielding stubbornness of the Earth, the strength and ferocity of animals, the mysterious forces of epidemics, the challenges of physical distances, the cycle of time and seasons, the vast spread of the cosmos whispered about only by the stars, the rise and fall of the sun. Then there was devotion. Now we have to constantly remind ourselves that the seeming security and confidence of Man remains in the unseen measures calculated by an agency or medium which regulates, maintains the movement of this abode Earth in its tolerable limits. An earthquake, a storm, any minor imbalance of the natural order can put us off at any minute, in doldrums. But Man has already got conditioned to his technologically transformed cocoon. So far so good, in this fools paradise.



The age of reason makes any one a sceptic. So faith may not be the basis of ones convictions. Yet one could observe that traditional Indian thought and customs have been dependant on a unique methodology and discipline predominantly weighing in favour of understanding links of humans phenomenally, on issues as large as balancing the equations of this universe, the implicit possibility of arriving at that level and the challenge of which, the discerning ones cannot ignore.

Those who study yet further will find that this tradition seems to attempt and contain the disparate elements of the Existential enigma,

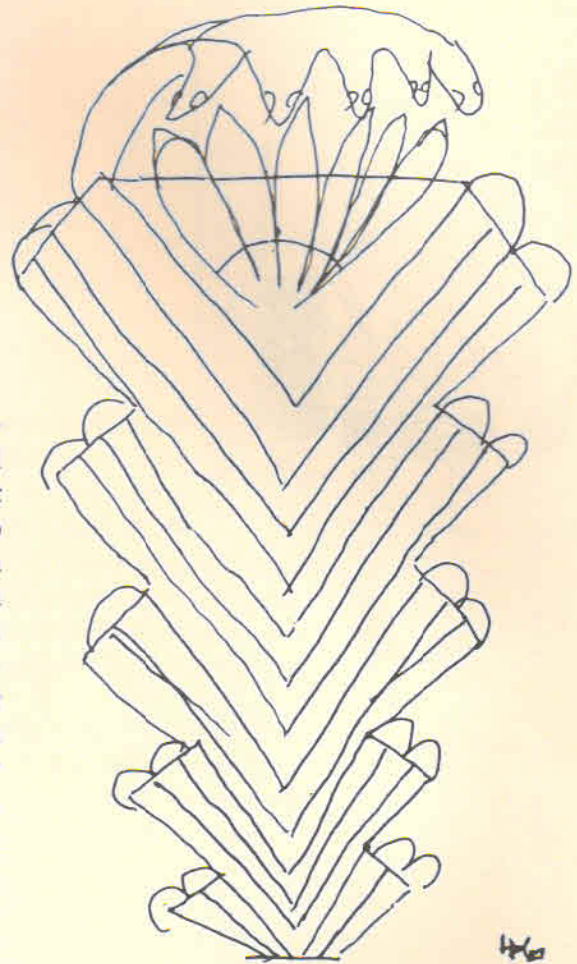


develop the strength to reduce (minimise) the physical and material needs of Man, treating them as inconsequential, embrace physical austerity in playful abandon, face challenges through abnegation, as if transmuting physical into immaterial spirit, unveiling it at that, and whereby displaying an extraordinary courage, as if having a source of strength within, which no other cultures elsewhere have asserted in such certain terms. This was the ideal of traditional India, beginning from Upanishads, through (Vasishta, Rama, Krishna, Vyasa, and so on) innumerable rishis, ascetics, Sanyasies, the guardians of Dharma.

Within the given span of Life, one has to make a choice whether to serve the Body, which is one kind of drive or to serve the call of the mind-spirit, to discover the realms of the terrestrial far reaches. Historically the latter has been decided for us Indians, at the expense of the former. The results have been bequeathed to posterity. To replace it is to pay a price, with the efforts of expert organisation of the physical life, and that is being realised as a herculean task and we are literally in the throes of such an exchange of sorts. That implies the transformation of the mind underlying, to the extent that the choice is now of each individual (not guided by the collective consciousness of the society). Traditional India can live hereafter only through the minds and activities of the individuals spread over the world.

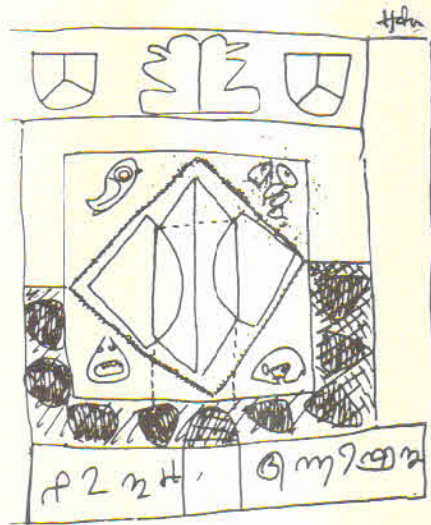
Very few among the teeming millions of this world are infected by the bug of the existential quest. Usually, the over-sensitive, fall prey to it. The numbers are dwindling even more, in our consumer culture, where people are being provided with ready-made solutions to their needs which extends to the unending number of alternatives to choose from, that engage them perpetually.

In the earlier ages material needs were challenging enough, to give them up and that had induced the quest all the more, to the extent that they probably couldn't have sorted them out to identify which quest was differing from which failures but now the signs of the infection can be found in the instant escape into travel and holidays but only at the tether end of life, inevitable as that is and unprepared but the quest finally, inevitably, turns on to an encounter, with the very spectre which looms larger and larger as days go by, which convinces one that it is a losing game.



For the last three hundred years ending with the former half of this century, it was the story of the decline of the real Indian Art, which finally has ceased to be. Sanscrit has ceased to be a means of expression, Yogis are laughing stalks, the perinneal kind of Logic and Philosophy, such as Tarka, Nyaya, Vedanta etc. had been buried. In this Vacuum, the seeds of present day celebrities could be sown and they are reaping but could not have if they try being Indian any more. The claims that they are and the change that has been brought about is at best, a myth built on the basis of a rationalisation that Art has to change in tune with the Times, that was propagated according to the norms of western Modern movements.

Isn't it intriguing and incomprehensible, how a system of thought that was ancient be promoted to challenge modernity and could be all



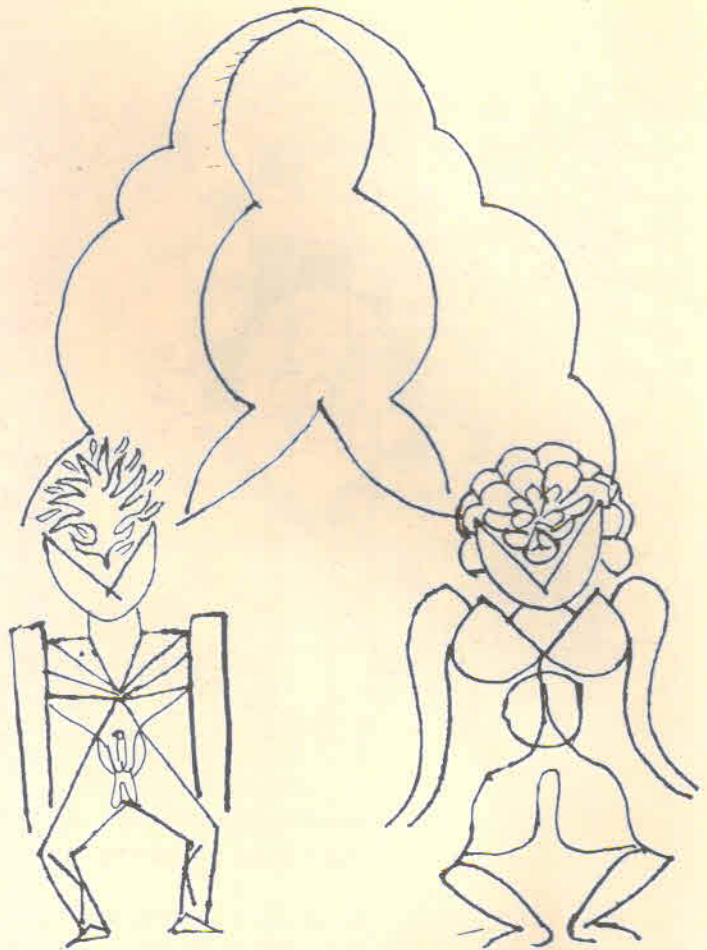
the same be Modern, similarly how can an outlook basically mystical be simultaneously rational? Any may question. It could only be for the reason that the Internal resources are the foundation for the outer manifestations, yet maintaining an independance and extention, an overview of directing the phisical aspect of life. Life as externally organised is limited to the phisical. The Indian view on human affairs were evolved considering the psychic and spiritual motivations, of mankind.

Traditional Indian Knowledge is rooted in mysticism, which is the ultimate of mastery. While most of the populace fumble about the heresays on it, mystics talk with authority, with an overview of life as a whole, so they can help integrate the so called progress brought about by modern science, which is compartmentalised in its organisational character. We are yet to recognise this as the resources for generating intelligence - the link and the medium. Instead of dismissing them as individual preserves of ideosycresies, they are to be discovered and acknowledged as valuable assets for tomorrows of the community.

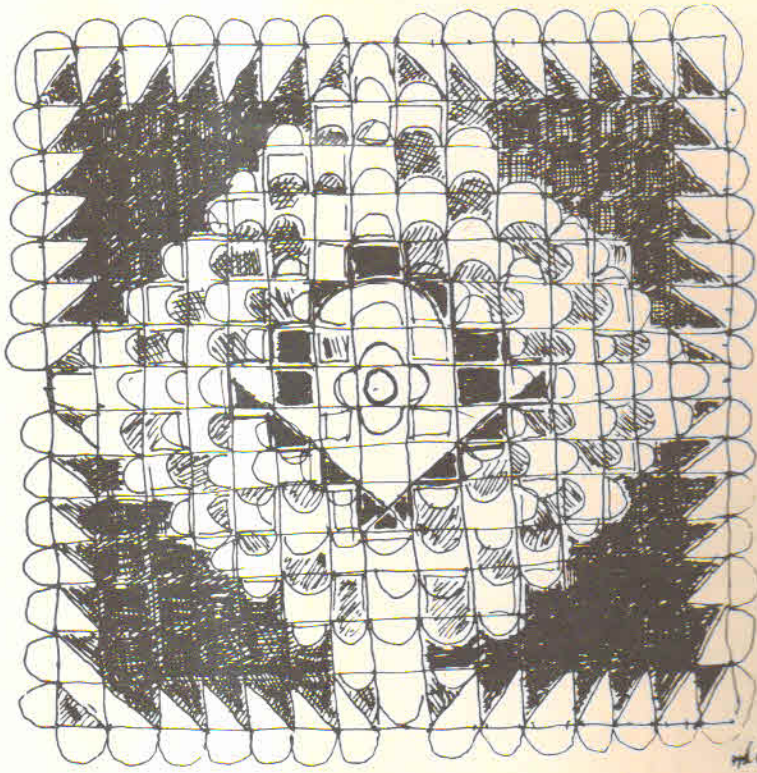
It is that one massive, all inclusive experience of reality, which the sages of the Upanishads had glorified, that diversifies into a variety of partial aesthetic experiences through the Arts and other social nicities. So, Art being one such a constituent of the original cause and although seemingly an achievement, subjectively for the person concerned (individual artist), yet is insignificant when weighed against the real source and can be inconsequential from the point of view of such a high aim, the kind of a concern that have cosmic dimensions. India inherits

such a tradition through generations, its people were traditionally oriented to that as the goal of Life, a transcendental aim, weighed against the acquisitive machinations of today. Such an order was maintained (infused) so that struggles of a futile kind are avoided in life, realising that fruitful struggles are only such of those which provides the strength to surpass mundane concerns.

What one believes as one's intentions, the image of it one has and to what extent one assumes them in practice and what is real, in most individual's cases differnt, confounding the confution filled world, unless insistantly, constantly tested against the source of intelligence itself, just as gold against touchstone.



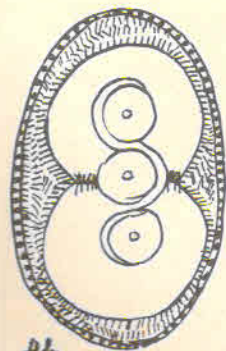
Self realisation, the pursuit of knowing ones inner depths, is alleged as a concoction of ones mind, as a myth, the mystical is treated often as an aberration yet man is often driven to reflection on his own state of affairs, and escapes into realms of fancy for vicarious experiences through dance or music through which he chanches upon a state of joy which is in itself, a wee-bit, far then from the mundane world, yet again dismisses them (as much in a hurry) as a hot potato, out of fright. But we have a whole tradition of practices, a sumptuous inheritance to



moment of today might slip by, as any moment could be that moment of realisation, of redemption.

There are a multitude of allegations by which India is written off as backward. But who has not been, before the advent of modern technology which grew from profit orientations. But search for knowledge with devotions to Nature's forces has been the perpetual concern in India. But most are never tired of exclaiming there was no psychology, no philosophy, no art, no science, no logic, no medicine in this part of the world.

In reality, the depth and range of traditional Indian Knowledge is such that, the skill of wading through is as exasperating as that of limitless oceanfaring. There are numerous streams of knowledge equally demanding, vying each other. There is the moral stream 'Dharma,' 'Karma' stream, Shastra stream and to top it all, - astrology (jyothisah). Karma stream defies even the highest epitom of devine presence, - as for instance 'Krishna' himself (for reasons probably of wearing the mantle of human form) when Gandhari's curse would dog



him and even his successors, to which they had to finally succumb. There is a vast collection of philosophic thought within which discursive logic has its legitimate role. What unifies and justifies all these interdisciplinary maze were the living presences of mystics who appeared from time to time and manifested the principles contained in them, in flesh and blood. They are the substance of Indian thought. That is found from Vyasa to Vasista, Krishna, Rama, Sankara, Buddha extending to recent times in Ramakrishna, Ramana, Tulsidas or Arabindo, Krishnamurthy, Rajneesh etc. And many more whom space doesn't permit here to account.

The tenacity of (living beings) humans in his clinging to life, defying destruction, the elaborate scheme for survival, is out of desperation. That itself is the proof of the glory in being alive. Some manage to sprout simple joys out of ruins. All the same he succumbs to death, spends himself out through the process of living. All have to accept it and leave it at that but the edification starts when all that in life is transformed into potentials of the self, through painting or music, poetry, or innumerable other skills, that way dares to go to the limits of his endowment and finally to its unlimited extension in communion.

Beauty is a means of communion within invisible areas, induced through the creative medium, in our context the visual medium. What is physically visible in nature is not meant to remain beautiful, as each element of what we observe, every aspect of it, has its function serving specific purposes. Recognising their great range and complexity, we labour to label them as beautiful. Artists are to make such areas which extends further beyond physical presence, say for instance, the auras of vision radiations and vibrations. Such works of art becomes devices that



help to raise consciousness, divorced from any immediate relative context, yet acquiring a status and pedestal lent to them from one's personal level of awareness. The responses from viewers will of course vary. Thereby, a single work of art becomes as many as the number of people who confront it.

There is the traditionally available insight which many musicians refer to as 'Nadabrahamam' out of which all sounds emerge and finally converge back to. The sounds which take shape in between these states, that of the multitude of activities represented by and recognised by a range of degrees of sounds from Mantras to the cacophony of the market place, are part of the scale of the potency of sound.

Similarly Art can be seen within the dimension of 'Drisyabrahamam' where there are differing grades of coloured forms representing the multifarious phenomena of Nature out of which the Artist discovers the potency of colour filled forms for his own realisation of the wonder and joy that elevates him.

So Brahman is the ultimate of miracles. It can simultaneously be all the senses as also objectified sensations. There is no more magic called for than the way you are willing to see them so.

Here the term 'Brahman' is meant 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.

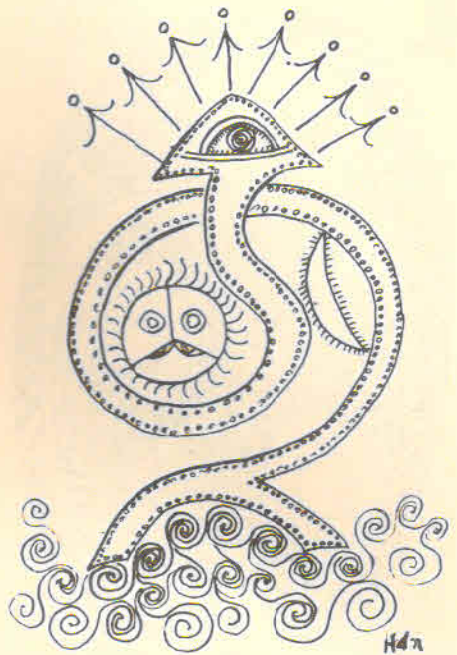
It is symbolised by Zero, 'O' and by the sound 'om' to mean 'purnam' the perfect and total, also described as 'Pujiyam' meaning 'deserving worship.' It is also stated to be "SATHYAM" "SIVAM" and "SUNDARAM." That implies it is the epitome of all beauty too, that, aspect which should involve the artist.

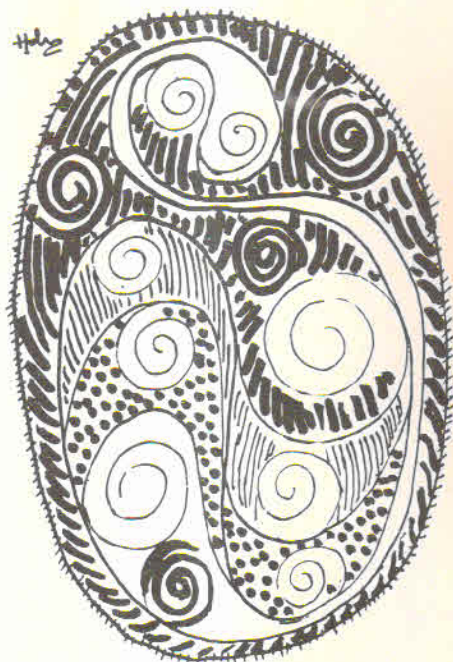
As a linguistic expression the term has a unique distinction.

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

'Brahman' is a concept at one level and is said to be an experience at another. It stands supreme among concepts created out of the urge to comprehend reality, reducing even the concepts of Time and Space to the relative. Brahman, the source and culmination of all, is a state of being and fulfilment. The knowledge of it is a revelatory attainment by subtle perception. A system of thought and rituals being based on such an existential quest spanning centuries, will continue to have substance, for all times.

Such an all consuming concept has fantastic implications. The proposition that to know Brahman is fulfilment itself, is challenging. It reduces all kinds of achievements other than the realisation of it to the secondary. Nature's products, from the elements to the various species of organic forms have an abundance and variety of form with an





ingenuity in function, which is revealing and all the same mysterious. The mystery is none the less if man has explained them. He can only use them, he has not created them.

Man, with his faculties of perception can observe that nature in its magnificence is a display of power (Shakti) contained in it and that power has a versatility and orientation and that power takes to an infinite range of manifestations, degrees in function, direction and motivation and that can be contained only on a subtle visionary level.

So the magnificence and massive proportions in Nature beyond man's reach is but the superficial, reactionary estimation of one of the creatures of Nature. This means the appearance of things are but an aspect far from the basic reality. What in our tradition meant by 'Maya' is none other than this. This illusory veil is said to be concealing the essential being i.e., Brahman.

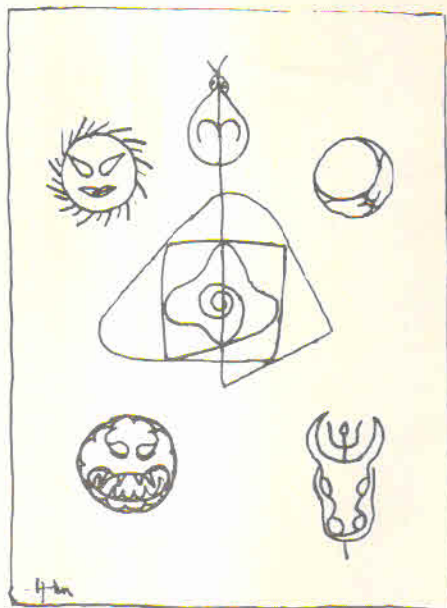
It is an inscrutable paradox in the visual phenomena that it is presented before you in diverse forms but they function through a structure. Geometry is that structure of reality, that carries the power and finality to be of forms. That too in an astounding simplicity. The magnetic radiating 'Point' takes two directions, the 'line' and the 'spiral curve.' and evolves into the three basic forms, 'TRIANGLE,' 'SQUARE' and 'CIRCLE.' No wonder the Tantrics found this of immense magical significance within the chimera of endless grades of Nature's self expression. For them to discover this was to contain power, to know this was to comprehend Nature. This proves also that the potency of Nature is within its tiniest invisible origins, expanding to its massive proportions, working on the self-same principles. This although refers only to a single dimension of nature, can very well be an analogy applicable to the multi-dimensional

natural phenomena. The essential, the basis on which Nature acts, the subtler level on which things function, yet we get hold of them rarely, reveals a fact that natural phenomena are basically non-material which can all the same have the so called material manifestations.



Colour, another manifestation, a separate dimension of forms, i.e., brilliance (ABHA in Sanskrit), is inherent in it. There are only three basic colours, with the intriguing fact that the combination of Blue and Yellow is complementary to the third, Red, and see the endless grades in which they can seep through! Colour a phenomenon by itself and Form, together, make visual art very complex indeed.

Every contentious issue must have a premise to abide by, to begin with, and what that is in itself is questionable which again begs a question, demand a ground and another premise and the procedure will lead to and end up at the ego of the person who employs these processes of enquiry which are actually the layers of conditioning the mind. Conditioning is to a great extent already inherited, as habits of thinking. The range of Samskaras, the numerous levels of the pros and cons that settles into personality as part of Karma and to be purified by Dharma which is the established moral code (derived out of wisdom), which again is slotted in to the cosmic system itself in which we are part of. The challenges are always against the fortitude we try to attain, the formidable efforts we manage to put into to reach at the eventual perception of the undaunted singleness of being, the all-knowing.

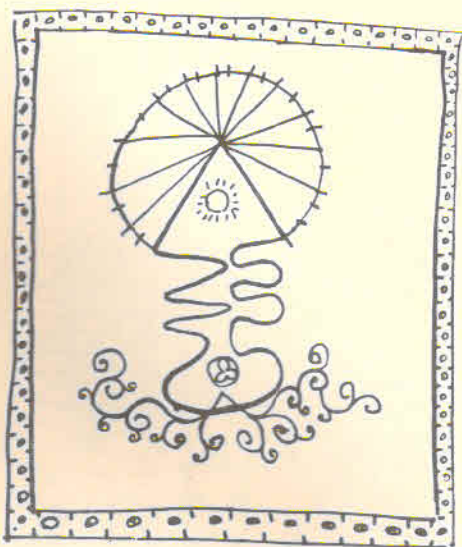


We in India traditionally had an abstract Art Form which is still preserved, in parts of our country, in their customary ritualistic practices. The system of values underlying these has been identified as Tantric.

In Tantra Brahman is the basic concept, the axle on which the wheel of phenomenal reality rotates. The intriguing duality in Nature, known as Purusha and Prakriti, - Siva and Shakti as personages, the five elements - Panchabhuthas - corresponding to the five senses, the three Gunas or functional qualities; all these constitute a unified, interacting whole. There are voluminous metaphysical treatises available on the principles of Tantra.

Besides our ancients had identified corresponding vital forces which operate within the human organism so that a link is established with the totality of the cosmic phenomena with the result that the reality observed does not remain the 'other' but becomes only an extension of the Self. Tantra remains the codified knowledge on this chimerical existence. The rituals concerned with this system were the means to realisation, a therapeutic means of liberating one's creative potential from inhibitions and for evolving the highest forms of self expression. Tantra naturally developed into a rigorous yoga discipline. So the tantric practices are in fact a complex and an elaborate process of actualisation based on preconceived results.

This invested traditional Indian art with a distinctive flavour and character which we can identify. Expressions such as 'Rasa' in dance or 'Raga' in music, are results of such an enquiry and are symbolic of the aesthetic joy and of the heights to which one can ascent in a state of Ananda.



2 11 83 Harid.

The formation of the mind, building up of mental faculties from infancy, is by the practice of imprinting impressions, representing them through sound, images, sensations, each distinct to begin with, later multitudes of their complex formations, all by repeated efforts, whose structures get built one over the other, as graphical and auditory chains, some after erasing the former and alternate formations get built and a new set get established. This process surprisingly has similarities to the nature and practice of rituals, repetitive in its nature. So who could dare say ritual has no significance in life. That is the only available method towards learning, to meet demanding situations, however redundant and defeating or trying, the technique of conditioning involved in it may be. The practice of rituals in the known sense is a reversal of this, a kind of de-conditioning, an escape route from the grooves, we are already in. We may (as well) use it, if need be.

In short, rituals are meant for dehabitualisation by the proces of counter-habitualisation inculcated in the form of rites.

Art tends to be more on the irrational, that way it can only be a symbolic gesture which is only a pointer to a reality, apart from what exists as observed or represented. If the onlooker doesn't realise this, the picture is not seen wholly. There are yet no finality of statement in Art either. Human beings, extending to those qualified as the so-called intellectuals, can't be bothered with finality of answers. Finality is spelt by such of those who have a total vision, for which mystics alone



contribute, only they can supercede the all too familiar jugglery of intellectual exercises.

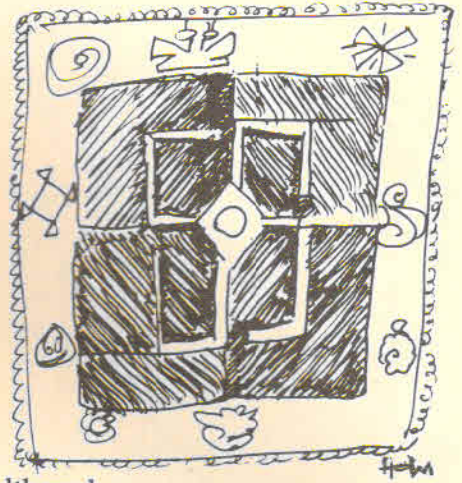
Those who have realised it, all of life though complex, is a fascinating tapestry, but for those who have not, it is as trying and rigorous as the succession of seasons of calamities, year after year.

One has to go a little beyond art to know the scope and limits of Art, just as you see the right shape of the Earth, its charm, as also its solitary splendour, from a space ship.

Art is to make aware of the scope of the spirit within, an integrated awareness of being as also its possible range to cosmic dimensions.

The elemental power of the medium of Music or painting give relief to an otherwise frustrating, anxious and very often painful circumstances in which humans are put. Yet they are often scared to confront the depths of it, which seem to suck them into its vortex, as that transforms personality and thereby have changed history earlier. That's how advanced level of creativity in various manifestations such as Music, Art, Literature, linking them to cosmic principles in the forms of Tantra, the character of an age gets formed. Art at its essential best are of such power.

All of Tantra or Yoga do not advocate renunciation but directs one to find the source of power, enhanced resources within the self, in terms of intelligence, perception, pleasure or capability. So one benefits by all round development, part of which is also the extrasensory perception.



Just as we don't do away with the wheel in industry for something new, simply for the sake of modernity, although something new through innovation of the wheel is desirable, so also, in art basic "Bhavas" continue to be relevant to communicate or express an experience through the sensibilities or the manner of expression evolved for the purpose.

Austerity and purity in expression in any form of Art indicates a mind free from diversions, an attitude closer to meditation.

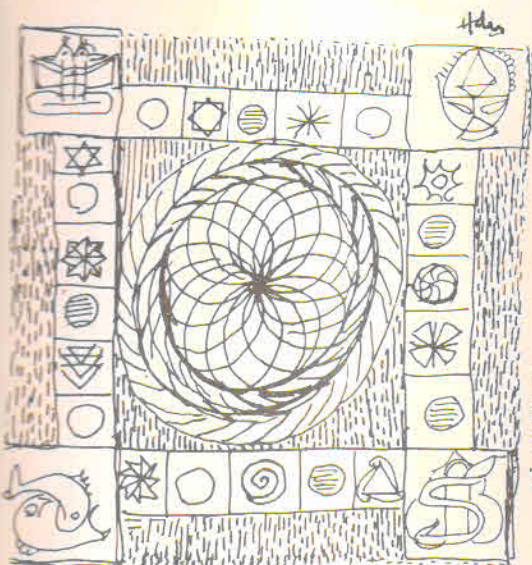
Geometry represents the structural principles without which nature cannot operate.

A line when given potency can become an axis on which the universe can rotate. One can as well also see it as a division on a paper, such of its values are revealed in this way by how much your vision can contribute to it, as much as in the relation delineated.

Colour has to act as a medium of possession, should be permitted to reach to its ultimate extent instead of limiting it as mere representations, be an agency of contact with cosmic forces. This is the way of knowing it.

Sensations by itself is magical. Concomittant vibrations transforms the mercuric mind, as they vary from situations, creates a world of fancy, fantasy.

The Human body comparatively is a mass of jelly, it has no hardness of a rock, no toughness of a tree trunk, no strength of mammals, neither



the agility of an eagle. But it has superb feelers, the see-through subtle intelligence. His superiority if any there is in this invisible, inorganic, immaterial sensitivity, coming through him. So much for the materialist.

Human (as also other beings) psychological states, either sentimental, emotional or cognitive are infectious. That is prone to have sympathetic responses or tend to create reactions, in the fellow beings and community in general i.e. each absorb and reflect similar to what is projected around, as also what one generates, registers on others. So if their mental activities are anxiety filled, tension filled, whole society become such. So it is also a social need to provide hope, search into areas in the mind which can engender beauty, confidence and love. That was once ment to be the purpose of art, to avoid suicide, whatever could have been the vagaries of real life. That's how we traditionally - maintained psychological strength.

K.V. HARIDASAN

- 1937 b. Cannanore Dist., Kerala
1958 Graduated from Madras University
1966 I Class Diploma in Painting, Govt. College of Arts & Crafts, Madras
1965-1968 National Cultural Scholar, Govt. of India
1970 Training in Fresco Painting, Banasthali, Rajasthan

EXHIBITIONS

- 1964-1977,79 National Exhibition of Art, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
1967-1985,87 All Exhibitions sponsored by Cholamandal Artists Village, Madras, Progressive Painters Association, Madras, Young Painters Association, Madras
1972 25 Years of Indian Art, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
1978 40 Artists of Madras, by the, British Council, Madras
1990 Special Invitee to the National Exhibition of Art, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS

- 1971 Paris Biennale, Paris
"Ten Modern Tantric Painters", at "Man & his world" Exhibition in Montreal, Canada
1975 II International Triennale, New Delhi, India
1978 IV International Triennale, New Delhi, India
1982 V International Triennale, New Delhi, India
1983 New Trantra, Exhibition at West Germany, Sponsored by the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, India.
1984 Group Exhibition of Indian Painters, Moscow, USSR
1985-1986 Neo Tantra Exhibition as a part of the Festival of India

Programme Exhibition at the University of California, USA
'Tantra' Exhibition at Australia, (1986)

- 1986 Asian Biennale, Bangladesh
1987 Festival of India, Exhibition of Art, USSR
1991 Special Invitee to the VI International Triennale, New Delhi, India.

ONE MAN SHOWS

- 1967 District Library Hall, Madras Fine Arts Society, Calcutta Triveni Gallery, New Delhi
1968 'Yantra Series' British Council, Madras
1969 'Yantra Series' & 'Yantra 69' both at Kumar Gallery, New Delhi
1971 'Bija Yantra' Series, Kumar Gallery, New Delhi
1976 'Brahma Sutra' Series, Lalit Kala Gallery, New Delhi
1978 Metal Reliefs, Gallery Chanakya, New Delhi
1981 'Brahma Sutra' Series, Kala Peetom, Cochin
1992 Brahma Sutra Series, Jahangir Art Gallery, Bombay

ARTISTS CAMPS

- 1981 Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, Akademis of Kerala, Kashmir and Madras Tamil University, Tanjore, Nag Foundation, Pune.
1988 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
1989-92 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
1992-1995 Senior fellowship of the Department of Culture, Min. of Human Resources, Govt. of India

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COMMENTS

Haridasan's Brahma Sutra Series great: Haridasan's paintings in the Brahma Sutra series are of exceptionally high quality and are claimed as symbolic notations of transcendental reality. This would not be obvious to the unilluminated, and in any case would be arguable. 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 serried triangles thrust like the spikes of a Macedonia phalanx.

The values of optical art 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.

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

In many of his 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. He establishes this sense of order with the use of very considered, formal colour which is cool but lucid. The 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.

Richard Bartholomew
The Times of India, December 1976, New Delhi

What surprises most is the newness in Haridasan... we just could not dismiss him lightly or his Yantra gimmicks which are pure Haridasan innovations. The geometric and non geometric forms are so imaginatively woven into the overall pattern of his paintings 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.

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 works. Thus there is pleasure here, of pure seeing. Many of the works guarantee it.

Keshav Mallik
Hindustan Times, November 1969, New Delhi.

In the "Yantra" series, Haridasan has broken away from tradition to try something entirely new. He uses archetypal symbols, birds, fire, sea... the vivid reds, purples, blues... This along with the resonance of these mystical shapes make most of the paintings extremely striking at first sight.

Girish Kamad
Indian Express, December 1968, Madras

Haridasan is one of the Indian artists responsible for creating the "Tantric trend" in modern Indian Art. He, however, uses 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

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Nirvriti Yantra 1975

Brahma Sutra, 1975



Brahma Sutra, 1975





Brahma Sutra, 1982

Brahma Sutra, 1991



Prakruthi Yantra, 1969

