



AN EVALUATION OF THE WORKS OF ASIT MUKHERJEE - AN EMINENT ARTIST OF ODISHA IN THE FIELD OF COMMERCIAL DESIGN AND ILLUSTRATION

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ABSTRACT The use of art and design was limited to the entertainment of people in form of paintings, drawings and illustrations in the olden days. Gradually the forms of art took the route towards commercialisation which is termed as Applied Art and Design. This segment uses art as a medium to visually communicate messages to people regarding different subjects. Late Mr. Asit Mukherjee, is a renowned artist in the state of Odisha (formerly Orissa) and is recognised for his contribution to the fine art. His talent of applying his art into various commercial ventures like illustration in books, book cover designs etc. helped the publishers and the authors to portray their books and its contents in a much presentable way. He was a pioneer and a legend in the field of art in the state and highlighting his contribution will inspire the budding artists of today to shape a good career in the world of Design.

KEYWORDS : Commercial Design, Illustration, Asit Mukherjee, Eminent Artist, Odisha Artist, Orissa Artist, Applied Art, Book Cover Design

1. INTRODUCTION

The name of Asit Mukherjee comes first to one's mind as an eminent book cover designer and illustrator in the state of Odisha. Obviously, he revolutionized the book and cover illustration to a large extent. Before him there were artists of repute like Gopal Kanungo, Bibhuti Kanungo, Bhagaban Das, Upendra Maharatha and Anadi Mahana etc. who followed the old tradition.

Asit Mukherjee studied in Govt. College of Art and Craft in Calcutta and returned to Orissa (now Odisha) and began his career as an artist. He settled at Cuttack, the headquarters of book publishers and soon made his presence felt among the book writers and publishers.

The book cover of stories and novels of the olden days were very formal and looked like text book cover. The cover design and lettering in Oriya (Calligraphy) by Asit Mukherjee soon took a new shape and its impact was enormous. A new design technique has arrived at last to illuminate the sky of the commercial Art in Odisha. His efforts in the field of book and cover illustration did not go in vain and soon his name flashed in news-paper and magazines all over Odisha as an emerging artist.

2. BIO-DATA IN BRIEF

Asit Mukherjee was born at Puri in 07-01-1933. His father was an artist, actor and director in the theatrical world, better known as Krishna Das Mukherjee. As an artist, Asit Mukherjee first settled at Cuttack and worked in a commercial art firm known as Silpa-Puri. He worked there for two to three years and then started his own art firm known as Silpa-Rupam. Thereafter, he never looked back and climbed over the ladder of name and fame and became the President of Odisha Lalit Kala Academy for consecutive three terms in a row. Even at the old age, he was working in full vigor till his death on 12-07-2008.



Fig. 1. Book *Asitayana* dedicated to Sri Asti Mukherjee

Asitayana, a book was published by *Shilpi Asit Mukherjee Smruti Sansada*, Cuttack, which aims to give tribute to the great artist of Odisha.

3. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HIS WORK IN THE FIELD OF APPLIED ART

One could distinctly see the change, he brought in the field of book and

cover illustration in the second half of the 20th century. Earlier, the publishers and readers paid less attention to the book cover design. When Asit Mukherjee started to incorporate illustration and typography in design, readers started to show interest in the book covers. This encouraged the publishers to go for professional book covers for their published books to attract the readers and increase sales.

The calligraphy which is seen in the books and magazines is the product of his mind. Before he began his career as a commercial artist, the calligraphy had no distinct size and shape. Mr. Mukherjee made systematical changes in the world of illustration and lettering in Odisha. He became a pioneer in the field and soon was recognised by all. His calligraphy and book illustration have a specific grammar of its own, which brought new concept in the world of illustration and designing. His figure drawing was perfect in every genre of human, animals, birds and plant kingdom etc. He studied the anatomy of his subjects vividly and accurately, so his drawing were flawless and true to the nature. There is certainly novelty and originality in his illustrations. His planning and execution are of highest order. His colour scheme is simply superb and appealing.

Later on a number of artists followed his tradition. In the field of modern art, Asit Mukherjee created some appealing works which won the praise and appreciation of his friends, book publishers, authors and critics as well.

4. BOOK COVER DESIGN OF ASIT MUKHERJEE



Fig.2. Book cover design of *Jharana Jhuri Jhuri Jaye*, 1973



Fig. 3. Book cover design of *Kanak Upatyakar Kahani*, 1994

In Fig. 2 and 3, the style of Asit Mukherjee's portrayal of typographical text and illustration is shown. The blend of illustration with text brings life to the cover of a book. The prospective reader can judge the contents of the book by the illustration in the top of it. The book cover also makes the book aesthetically pleasing to hold in the hands or placing it in a table to be demonstrated. It is a pride for the reader to hold a book which looks pleasing and gets appreciation from friends and relatives. The priceless possession of holding something attractive and beautiful in form of a book always makes the person happy.

5. BOOK ILLUSTRATIONS OF ASIT MUKHERJEE

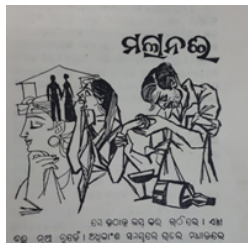


Fig. 4. Illustration in the Book *Jharana Jhari Jhari Jaye*



Fig. 5. Illustration in the Book *Jharana Jhari Jhari Jaye*

In Fig. 4 and 5, the illustration sketches of Asit Mukherjee can be seen which adds attraction to the inner pages of the books also. In old days, books were only in the form of text inside. But, adding figures and illustrations has given more emphasis to the readers who feel happy to see the composition of both the text and drawings. As far as visual art is concerned, a drawing or illustration speaks faster than the words and make the scene easily understandable. This trend started from Asit Mukherjee and is continued by other artists.

6. RELATION OF THE THEME OF BOOK COVER DESIGN WITH THE CONTENT



Fig. 6. Book cover design of *Raga Todi*, 1979

In Fig. 6, the book cover design of *Raga Todi*, demonstrates the drawing of a Veena which symbolizes the content of the book from a distance. A text requires a specific distance to be read, but an art or illustration can be seen from a distance and the theme can be understood. There are many books which are much informative, but in a huge collection of thousands of books in the library, it is very difficult to get attracted towards a book by its title text. The images and illustration in the cover design attracts the reader in a much more comfortable way from a distance.

7. BOOK WRITERS AND PUBLISHERS VIEW ON ASIT MUKHERJEE

The writers and book publishers of 1950's had a particular choice for their book cover designs. Most of the writers and publishers preferred artists like Asit Mukherjee, Asim Basu, Baldev Maharatha, and Siba Panigrahi etc. These were the people who had earned their name and fame in the field of book cover design and book illustrations.

The pioneer in the field of book cover design is regarded as Asit Mukherjee by the writers and publishers. Most of the publishers and writers say that their first choice of book cover design and illustration was Asit Mukherjee during that period. It is so because Asit Mukherjee was a creative person and his style of designing was very unique which only few people had. His style of typography, color combination and knowledge of printing technology of that period was excellent and he provided a perfect output without errors. Publishers and writers say that he was a blend of commercial art as well as a master of aesthetics of painting which helped him to attract the customers towards their published books. Book publishers and writers of today say that they can get their book cover designed at any DTP (Desktop Publishing) center, but the uniqueness which artists like Asit Mukherjee provided lacks in them. The writers and publishers too believe that old is gold, but they have to move on with time and advanced technologies.

8. UNIQUE TYPOGRAPHY STYLE

The unique typography style of the title was developed by Asit Mukherjee for his designed books. The title of the book is one of the main attraction of the Book cover design. Now-a-days, there are thousands of ready-made fonts in the computer software to develop text titles, but in the olden days it was the artist's creativity of forming alphabets in a unique design of their own.



Fig. 7. Title design of book *Omkar Dhvani*, 1987

In Fig. 7, the typographical style of Asit Mukherjee can be seen where he has blended his illustration with the title text. There are numerous artists with specialization in art and painting, but the style and art of writing a text is limited to a few creative artists only and out of them, Asit Mukherjee stands out as a most preferred one in the state of Odisha.

9. CONCLUSION

Asit Mukherjee is a successful artist, who did some pioneering works in his sphere and he is far ahead of his contemporaries in thought and works. Besides that he has profound knowledge about photography, moviemaking, interior-decoration and organizing exhibition. He is an example of an all-rounder in the field of creativity. He is an inspiration to lots of budding junior artists to use their creativity and make their name and fame in the world of art and design. He set an example that creativity and art work is an inherited knowledge and not something which can be learned by just paying huge fees to big institutions. A person with creativity and a formal knowledge from a small institution and small place can also gain success and respect in the world of applied art which is used mostly in commercial purposes. It may be book cover design, book illustration, advertisement posters, banners, leaflets etc. With fusion of art and creativity, a person can become a successful artist and designer. In the world of art, the work speaks more than the identity of a person. When people see advertisements of a company in magazines, newspapers etc. no one notices the artist name, hence applied artists in commercial industry are unsung heroes who are recognised by the success of their outputs rather than their names. Artists should always concentrate on their art and its development, which will eventually make them successful in life.

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