Research Paper Art

Transformations in the Art of Sayed Haider Raza

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ABSTRACT

Syed Haider Raza or S.H. Raza the eminent international Indian artist who has lived & worked in France since 1950, but also maintained strong relations with India. His style of works is mainly in abstracts with oils and acrylic. He used very rich and vibrent colours. He has taken icons from Indian cosmology as well as its philosophy. In December 2006 auction, a painting by Raza sold for US $1.4million. S.H. Raza started study art at age 12 and after his high school he studied further at the Nagpur School of Art and later on Sir J. J. School of Art, in Bombay. Then he moved to France in 1950 to study at the Ecole nationale superieure des Beaux-Arts (ENSB-A) in Paris. After his studies, he travelled across Europe & continued to live and exhibit his work in Paris. He experimented with currents of Western Modernism which were moving from Expressionist modes towards greater abstraction & eventually incorporating elements of Tantrism from Indian scriptures. His fellow contemporaries dealt with more figural subjects. But Raza opt to focus on French landscapes as he was inspired by them. From his flowing water colours of landscapes and townscapes that he used in the early 40's he moved to a more significant language representing - landscapes originate from the mind. The following research describe about his life, motivation and influences on his work, transformation in his ideology, and further developments in his art.

KEYWORDS art, abstract, colours

S.H. RAZA was born in Babaria, Madhya Pradesh, India, on Feb 22, 1922. Lived in "lap of Nature" as his father was working as a forest ranger. He started sketching at the age of 12. He studied at Govt. High School at Damoh, where an art master noticed him and divined his talent. In 1939, when he was 17, sent to Nagpur School of Arts. In 1943, he entered Bombay School of Art. In 1947, he was awarded diploma with a Gold Medal. During this time he did hard work, he draws all the time and sleeps on the spot at night, stretched out on the table. In 1947, he became one of the founder members of the Bombay progressive group (a break free from the European realism in Indian art). In 1950, he was also awarded two travelling study grants from the Indian Government and French Government. In 1962, he was a visiting lecturer in the "University of California in Berkeley, USA".

PERSONAL LIFE

S. H. Raza was married Janine Mongillat, his fellow student at Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris, in 1959, and at the request of her mother not to leave France, Raza chose to stay and reside there in France. Janine had died on April 5, 2002 in Paris.

MOTIVATION, INITIATION AND INFLUENCES.

Rudy Von Lyden, Prof. W. Langhammer, and Schlesinger were the three main people who motivated him and put him and his work in concern.

Rudy Von Lyden, an art cirtic, noticed his art works exhibited by Bombay art Society in 1943, These were two paintings which were selected by Bombay Art Society. And these two paintings were hanged in a dark corner of the gallery. Rudy noticed them and gave a review in Times of India through which he became known.

Professor. W. Langhammer, showed him prints of Indian miniatures specially of Jain and Rajasthan and also the prints of western artist's works like Van Gogh, Monet, Cezanne, and said him to dissect them. He said " Look at them, try to find the difference between Matisse and a Picasso painting, or to differentiate between Monet and Cezanne".

From the miniatures Raza grabs the vibrancy and emotionative qualities of colours and the compartmentalization and division of the canvas for the miniatures, also the burning colours of the miniatures from Mewar and Malwa, searing sensations of his own land, raw and passionate colours of miniatures evoked to express contemporary reality in his works and from western prints he learned the geometry and abstractions.

Schlesinger, took him affectionately and helped him in every possible way- purchasing his pictures and introduces his works to many people.

He was also inspired by his childhood memories also when he was staying with his father in forest ranges. He was fascinated with the beauty of nature around him. He used to wander in the forests observing beauty of nature. Due to which we can see beautiful landscapes in his early phase of paintings. Moreover, thick lush forests and natural surroundings of his childhood were awakened. He says that the nights in the forests were hallucinating and sometimes the only humanization influence was the dancing of the Gond tribes. The day break brought back a response of security and well being on market day under radiant sun and the village became a fairy land of colours, but then come the night again. These two aspects of my life dominate me and are an integral part of my paintings.

India philosophy and poetry also influenced him. While in 1970's his visits to India he was in contact with the philosopher, writers poets and also the painters and found in their writings a spark that would ignite his muse. He visited Bhopal, and discovered the poetry of Gajanan Madhava Mukti bodh, whose quote he used in one of his painting on Bindu. 'Vishava Tama Sunya Mai Tahalti Hai Jagat Samiksha". He also met Agaya, Surya Kanta Tripathi Nirala, Kedar Nath Singh and discussed about India philosophy in their terms. Later on in his work he used poetic lines below the his paintings " Maa lautkar jab aaounga, kay laonga"? These paintings maintains a breathtaking balance between Raza's increasing consciousness of Indian spiritual and philosophical thought.

The works of western artists like Monet, Van Gogh, Cezanne, Matisse, Jackson Pollock, Picasso, Paul Klee and Carl Jung influenced him specially of cezanne. He went to Cezanne's provenance 'Maritime Alps' to paint the beautiful city and townscapes. The love heavy human architecture in the paintings of Cezanne which stored him to tranquility with their straight lines. He learned how to broke surfaces, Visual construction on the surface of canvas from Cezanne's paintings. He did not imitate him, he has his own vocabulary of dissecting surface but he was inspired by him. In the

works of Van Gogh he found exploration of passionate colours, frontal idols and mysterious pagan divinities enchant and bewitched him reminded him the painc of night and silence which he had felt while living in forest ranges . Form Jacksom Pollock he learned abstractions were colour patches were placed on canvas one above the other and the canvas surface also become the tool for the form to emerge.This was the exercise for his gestural strokes on his canvas. There was no geometrical construction or biomorphic references, gird or illustration of spatial recursion. The very face of dripping or pouring paint, the process of the end of painting became its form. And he got the gift of Vision to look back in the memories of his childhood.

Byzantine art also attracted him. The imagery space of the painters of middle ages is much more in harmony than that the measureable space of High renaissance.

The Tantric beliefs with their evocative values also influenced Raza.

THE BINDU

During his childhood, Nand Lal Jharia, his teacher, punished him on his restlessness. He drew a large dark stark against a clean background and said, "Is Bindu Par Dhayan Do". Memorising that event, Raza says, "My introduction to a certain idea which was later to become my leitmotif, an integral part of my art, the very backbone supporting my body of work. This was the concept of Bindu".

Also By the 1970s Raza had grown increasingly dissatisfied,unhappy and restless with his own work and wanted to find a new direction and deeper authenticity in his work, and move away from what he called the 'plastic art'. His trips to India, especially to caves of Ajanta-Ellora, followed by those Benaras, Gujarat and Rajasthan, made him realise his roots and study Indian culture more closely, the result was 'Bindu', which signified his rebirth as a painter. The Bindu came forth in 1980, and took his work deeper and brought in, his new-found Indian vision and Indian ethnography.

The unique energy vibrating with colour in his early landscapes are now more subtle but equally, if not more, dynamic. Raza abandoned the expressionistic landscape for a geometric abstraction and the Bindu. Raza perceives the Bindu as the center of creation and existence progressing towards forms and colour as well as energy, sound, space and time.

Also his inner experiences while he was dissatisfied with his work, gave a way which lead him to Bindu. He says, "There was a state of emptiness. I stopped painting for a while. I tried to look within instead of looking around. It was a complex and very difficult period when everything seemed dark and empty. But I continued. I followed my states, my intuitions. And from this blank space there emerged a black point. This black point grew and grew and became a black circle. I stared. I found there was a horizontal line hardly perceptible and yes, there was a vertical line too. A certain electric charge came which engendered energy. The condition of the subway became clearer and slowly colours started appearing. White, yellow, blue and red. It was obvious that along with the initial black, this would form the colour spectrum. And this so much belonged to us in India and much belonged to me also. And I realized that the water of the river Narmada was flowing still in my veins. I thought I should go deeper and deeper and from this emerged a point. From this emerged the whole possibility of thinking and working slowly, very slowly, paintings came one after one almost form their inner necessity.

CONCEPT OF TANTRA IN RAZA'S ART. Regarding Tantra Raza has his own pre-occupations primarily that of Bindu and Sri yantra. He also has affinity with the Tantric symbols in his work. He is also interested in the concept of Kundalini. But he refuted the nomenclature 'Neo-Tantric', claiming that it was far too complex and he knew too little of its beliefs. He also has the opinion that Neo- Tantra was not that of actual Tantra art or its yantra and mandlas, which were essential as components of ritual and religion. According to Raza, in Tantra, the Bindu represents the indivisible unity of the static male principle and the female kinetic principle, which together in their unity create the entire universe of the matter and spirit. Therefore, it is the smallest unity beyond which energy cannot be condensed. In the cosmological terms, it is the creative matrix of the universe, the Visva-Bija- the world seed- the central energy for which all things originate and return. The root forms from which yantras or sacred diagrams are constructed are the circle, the triangle, and the square. The circle is an expanded Bindu within which lies the notion that time has no beginning or end. The triangle is the primary enclosure since space cannot be bounded by fewer than three lines. Hence, it is the root matrix of nature, where in its inverted form it is feminine power while the triangle with its apex upwards, denotes the male principle. The square is the substratum, the fundamental base of all the yantras, denoting the terrestrial world which has to be transcended. These three, in their permutations and combinations, constitute the yantras, the sacred diagrams that are used as aids to meditation. These diagrams occurred in several combibations. The most frequent is the interpenetration of two triangles, male and female in perfect unity, which forms the star hexagon. Raza shared an affinity with these symbols. He also says about Kundilini, "I am very much interested in the concept of the Kundilini- that dormant energy which has to be awakened. Just imagine, our sages have said this truth many centuries ago. It is fantastic- when they talk about the serpentine energy. It is fabulous. Our Libido is linked to artistic energy and all other awareness. Sex energy is intricately linked up with artistic expression".

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN HIS ART

In the 1990's, Raza had begun to find a consonance between music and art, stating that the two heightened and amplify each other, he says, "There is also an important, even essential dimension that is shared between painting and poetry and music. This invites participation from the viewer. In Indian poetics and theory, this is called rasadhvani. The melody, the mood of a time of day or of a season, is embodied in a painting, is personified by the figuration of a man or a woman, their meetings, their partings, a climate of things- reflected in nature, in the trees and birds and the lotus ponds, in the skies".

But the question arises whether art can resonate sound or whether music and painting can at best be analogous to one another? Even in the Ragamala Pantings of seventeenth century, musical notes are metaphorical figures that are considered musical only in an symbolic, and not actual sense.

For all the dissonances in Raza's work, it never fails to arouse at the sensuous level and it is in this that his compositions reach their element. His involvement with pigment and colour vibrations are always technically sound and at their best call into play a heady mixture of paint and ecstasy. If this reaches a subliminal peak in his middle period, there is at all times an evocation of the heightened spirit. At his most prolific, Raza retains a passionate link with experiences drawing form indigenous sources, form the hot colours of Rajasthan and the miniatures, form the natural landscape of his country and form its metaphysical and literary thought in a distinctive manner. At its weakest, Raza's work becomes mannered, where an absence of conflict robs it of its dynamism, and it veers towards the decorative, at its most vital, it retains a passionate link with both formal and intuitive qualities, giving it what the artist most desire- significant form.

PUBLIC CONTRIBUTIONS

He has also founded 'Raza Foundation' in India, promotion of art among Indian youth, which also gives away, Annual Raza Foundation Award, to young artists.

AWARDS

- He became India's priciest modern artist on June 10, 2010 when a seminal work, 'Saurashtra' by the 88-year-old sold for Rs 16.42 crore ($3,486,965) at a Christie's auction.
- 1946: Silver Medal, Bombay Art Society, Mumbai.
- 1948: Gold Medal, Bombay Art Society, Mumbai.
- 1956: Prix de la critique, Paris.
- 1981: Padma Shri; the Government of India.
- 1981: Fellowship of the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.
- 1981: Kalidas Samman, Government of Madhya Pradesh.
- 2007: Padma Bhushan; the Government of India.

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