



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Arts

THE GREAT TITANS OF ODISHAN ART AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO MODERN ART MOVEMENT OF ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

The beginning of the art movement was tinged with colonial flavor; therefore it was no wonder to find a Company kind of painting style pursued in earlier Khallikote. However, the presence of stone carving, pottery, cane furniture making, leather crafts, sewing and knitting in the curriculum didn't add any native culture, rather highlighted the farcical dichotomy between the 'fine' and 'applied' art teaching. The earlier Odishan masters like Gopal Charan Kanungo, Basant Panda, Bipin Bihari Choudhury, Purna Chandra Singh, Muralidhar Tali and Bichitrananda Mohanty were the precursors of the Western academic style in Odisha. Their students and the artists of the second and third generations. In Odisha, western academic style has its local version. There seems a definite route chart that signaled the change in artistic perception and practice. In the contemporary pictorial language of Odisha there is less of Odishan flavor.

Much before the art schools started teaching easel painting, the Rajas and Zamindars in Odisha developed a fashion to acquire European easel paintings to decorate their palaces. When the art schools were established in Odisha, these ideas percolated into the minds of teachers and students as well as the public. The school functioned as an alternative to literary, university education, providing vocational and technical training to those among the educated middle-class "who have an aptitude for art-work and look to the School as the only way left which will lead to active employment without affecting their caste or social status." Already by the middle of the nineteenth century, the two social categories of 'artist' and 'artisan' due to the impact of western education stood sharply differentiated and graded. Cubism came to India at the end of the 19th century and to Odisha in 1960s. Though Gopal Charan Kanungo was following the Abanindranath Tagore's cubic oriented paintings but it was Ajit Keshary Ray's oil painting *The Flight* that made a mark with simultaneous appearance of cubism in the work of Dinanath Pathy, *The Harvesting Songs*. The cubic over-laying is still the stimulation of modernism in Odisha. Modernism and cubism driven out of their true context and meaning are practiced as another genre along with western academics in art schools. It is still the easel painting tradition. The contemporary pictorial language, which emerged from the imitations of the British academics, later was challenged by the *Swadesi* revivalist art. Sarat Chandra Debo's new synthesis embraced Western perspective, dramatization and Eastern linearity and flat surface. But finally it induced a cubistic mode in approach to art and became instrumental in making a new modern art in Odisha.

The mediaeval Odia literature that has been closely juxtaposed with paintings and drawings on the pages of palm leaves become completely separated with the ushering of modern literature and use of printing machines to print books. The use of wooden and zinc blocks made the endeavour of illustration costly. However it used to influence the art practices in pre-independent Odisha. But due to the modern art movement it gradually drifted away.

Muralidhar Tali could be considered as the last flicker among Odia artists who painted like the European masters on the native soil. In fact he has imbibed the western academics through his teachers during his study at Kolkata. Tali participated in many art shows and gained acclamations, recognitions and awards. Tali's works are in the important collections in the country such as the Special Hall, Barabati Stadium in Cuttack; Odisha State Legislative Assembly, Governor House, Odisha Lalit Kala Akademi, Odisha State Museum and Utkal University in Bhubaneswar; Sambalpur University in Sambalpur; Parliament House, National Gallery of Modern Art and Lalit Kala Akademi in New Delhi; and in private collections abroad in Toronto, New York, Tokyo and Colombo. Tali was a master of portraiture. The art of portrait

painting has now diminished. The advanced and sophisticated technology of photography is also challenging the one time high mark of professionalism in portrait painting. Still, Tali's portraits dominate the art field in Odisha. He was fluent with the techniques of oil painting. He was methodical, crafty, skilled and technically proficient. His paintings show the influence of the European school of portraiture. Often his paintings portray the nationalist issues and sociological aspects. Tali's portraits have the highly dramatic and matured effect of multi-tones and light and shades. There are pure accomplished professional finishing touches. His human forms are linear, flowing with soft sleek lines. There is sensitive usage of dabs and dashes upon an uplifting background.

Gopal Kanungo was a prolific and remarkable as an illustrator, cover-designer, portraiture, water colorist, and painter. Kanungo was a figurative and realist painter. But one of the pronounced aspects of his work could arguably be described as "magical realism" comparable to the works of modern Latin American and African American writers and painters. The subtle and attenuated colours used, the sensuousness of figures and compositional movement, convey the sense of "magical realism" not of fantasy special-effects, and make-belief. The other aspect pertains to his temperament and choice of the content of his art work, which spans oils, water colours, wash and temperas, and sketches. Odia personalities dominate his portraits; these are of prominent Odia poets, writers, artists and activists. His sketches and water colours consist mostly of potters, carpenters, farmers, cobblers, and the like as well as of rural scenes and life from Odisha. One could therefore draw the conclusion that Kanungo was an artist of the common and ordinary folk as well as of the rural, not of the elite and wealthy nor of the urban landscape. The sensitivity, warmth and evocativeness with which he has rendered them, vividly demonstrate the kind of man and artist Kanungo was. He combined a nationalist feeling and disposition as an Odia with his inclination toward "magic realism" with such skill and expressiveness.

Upendra Maharathi was indeed versatile; painter, architect, and designer. He had an inclination towards arts from his very childhood. After completing his school, he went to Calcutta on the advice of his Art Teacher. Upendra Maharathi enrolled himself in Calcutta's School of Arts, the environs of which determined his future devotion to arts. At this juncture, the indigenization or liberation from western influence of modern Indian art started by people. Maharathi too, was associated with this tradition of Bengal School and so, after completion of his education, he decided to provide a base to these forms in his pursuit of art. Apart from this, due to his affection towards the folk art since his childhood, wherever he went for his personal or government work, he attempted to promote the folk arts of that area wholeheartedly. The opening of the Odishan contemporary art scene into national

and international art arenas made it global. The installation art, conceptual art and the performance art threw challenges to the modern Odishan but otherwise dogmatic art scene.

A new pictorial language was born out of the British impact and formed the synthesis, which was otherwise known as the Company art; local in its skill and British in its attitude. The cubism then brought in changes on the model drawings, landscape and still life studies. Successively impressionism, expressionism, sur-realism made their working on the modern art movements in Odisha. With the establishment of the first Government art and craft school at Khallikote in early sixties, the modern art movement got a boosting. The students trained at Khallikote entered the public arena as artists and tried to practice this new art. For the first time two kinds of pictorial language were prevalent, one the traditional and the other modern understood as anti-traditional. The modern pictorial language syndrome has several sources like Calcutta and Santiniketan to depend on. It really tried to be a conglomeration. The globalization of art concepts posed a problem, the problem of loss of identity and threatened to wipe out the local dialects and their indigenouslyness. It was no more the class between art language of Odisha and pictorial language of the Indian metropolis; it was a multipronged attack on the Odishan pictorial art traditions. A few modern artists took up the cause of the traditional pictorial language and tried to revalidate it and reinvent it with new meanings to make them viable international art. They even involved local dialects and raised their voices against standardization. The globalization syndrome in art does not reject the local traditions; on the contrary, it is fed on several local dialectical art language principles. With the introduction of Internet as the best medium of coming closer to World art movements, no art tradition should feel neglected; rather we should empower our own pictorial language to convey our ideas and images to a world community.

The Odishan Art scenario is definitely making a move from its static regional fundamentalism to a dynamic contemporary adaptability in a fast changing international art situation. Odisha is no more confined to its geographical space but has transcended beyond into a new international experience with inputs constantly filtering in through the meaningful interactions with other metropolitan cultures all over the world. Odisha's issue is no more regional but an issue, which sympathizes with the rest of the global phenomena. The art is no more pedantic skill oriented manifestation of the so called 'beautiful' but it is an highly intellectual exercise of conceptual and psychic mind aimed at international issues with a language developed and built locally to meet the challenges.

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