

Modern Art of Jammu & Kashmir: A survey

(Oblivious sequel of events 1947- 2018)

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Introduction

The beginning of Modern Art Movement in Jammu and Kashmir can be attributed to the early years of post-Independence phenomenon that developed out of the political turmoil caused by Pakistan's barbaric attack on the valley of Kashmir. Those were the days, when the Dogra rule in the state was on its last legs. The weak forces of Maharaja Hari Singh had capitulated before the expert onslaughts of the heavily armed Pakistani guerrilla forces. The Maharaja abandoned Kashmir, thus leaving behind his helpless subjects in lurch and the government passed into the hands of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, who was the most popular leader of the masses at that time. The infiltrators comprising both regular and irregular armed forces of Pakistan were however pushed back subsequently with the help of Indian army.

Movement of resistance

While surveying the political development of Jammu and Kashmir from the 1930 onwards it becomes clear that the sentiment of resistance against the Maharaja's rule had already begun to show signs of smouldering. To affect a change in the existing political structure of the state from the autocratic ruler ship to pro-people governance, the local intelligentsia had decided to align the socio-political and economic identity of the people of Kashmir on the progressive lines.³ However the suppressive policies of the Maharaja's had forced the movement to go underground. The sudden abdication of his political authority by Maharaja Hari Singh in 1947 led the state of Jammu and Kashmir to a situation of utter chaos and confusion. This and the attack of tribal raiders led to a mass mobilisation of the volunteer groups of Peace Brigades fully endorsed and supported by emergency administration.

Formation of cultural front

At the same time however a National Cultural Front was organised. The said front comprised of budding theatrical talents, folk musicians and singers and commercial artist such as Somnath Khosa, and P.N. Kachru. G.M. Sadiq, the chief emergency officer of Kashmir at that time was able to spark an enthusiastic flip among the national cultural front volunteers by requisitioning the services of Mr. Pardesi who formed to the nucleus of cultural propaganda working from a hotel adjacent to Paladium Talkies in the Lal Chowk. It is from here that the national cultural front became the voice of the masses and the hub of artistic activities in Kashmir that included many writers, poets, painters and performers such as theatre - artists, musicians and singers.⁴

Somnath Khosa and Shri P.N. Kachru, also joined the movement as working artists in the Art Wing. Both of them got into an aggressive disseminative cultural campaign. They painted and displayed illustrations about the latest happenings in Kashmir, vis-à-vis the recapture of Baramulla and Sopore towns from the tribal raiders. Illustrative poster portraits of eminent political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and the local political mentor of the masses Shekih M. Abdullah were also put on display near Paladium cinema in Lal chowk area. Thousands of people would swarm to look at these pictures denoting victory. The news of the total destruction of the enemy (raiding tribal groups) was also loudly announced by the Peace Brigades in the streets of Srinagar to boost the sagging morale of the thousands of victims who been forced to seek refuge in the city of Srinagar.

Much of the art and literature produced in the early years of the Cultural Front was political in nature and propagandist in idiom. The expression remained elusive with regard to its creative and aesthetic value. As a result of this, the art of painting got restricted to the publicity theme that was purely political in orientation. These posters were meant for the propagation of a particular political agenda.⁵ Rest of the arts, namely, play-writing; literature, poetry and music also got reduced to political subservience.⁶

A strong urge and inquisitiveness to know about the fundamentals of drawing and painting led Triloke Kaul to visit Amar Sing Technical Institution to acquire information about the academic curricula of art there. It was during this visit that he had his first direct encounter with Kachru who had already sought admission in the Institute. The Institute provided regular and casual admissions to students opting for various courses. The sole purpose of the institution was to establish and revitalize the promotion of the local crafts, and imparting training in floral design, drawing, painting and clay modelling along with other subjects like smithy, willow work etc.⁷ Local trainees were introduced to the tools of western realism like drawing from models, nature studies in water colours, oil painting etc. Many of the good drawing teachers like K.N. Bhan, Sat Lal Kampassi (vice principal of the technical institute), D.N. Wali, Dost Moham-mad Khan and many others were products of this institute. While taking a round of the Institute, Triloke Kaul, recalls that on his first visit to the institute he “saw one lady painting a Chinar. It was a copy work from a printed photograph and the rest of the area in the composition was drawn from memory. Mr. Jyotish Chandra Mukerjee, Principal of the Institute from West Bengal was painting the composition for her”.⁸ Vision that was fast emerging from my sensibilities was to quit this limited cell and fend for search into the limitless vistas of non-regimentally.”⁹

1948: The year of establishment of Modern art

The period of eight months from March to September 1948 can be considered as a watershed in the history of Painting in modern Kashmir. The said period was decisive in the founding of Cultural front. However, it was out of the Cultural front itself that a new group of artists was born in June 1948.

Triloke Kaul, an important member and a living stalwart of the group alludes that their association had a warm relationship with various other contemporary organisations like Progressive Writers Association, Indian Progressive Theatre Association etc. Elaborating on the

subject he is on record to have said: “We painted the subject matter that they needed at that point of time. We depicted what had taken place in Kashmir and held shows and exhibitions of our works. We established the Progressive Artists Association in Kashmir which was affiliated to none. We had sisterly relations with the organisations like P.W.A, I.P.T.A, and the P.A.A”.¹⁰ He further elaborates that their group (P.N. Kachru, Somnath Butt and ApurabSomnath) owed much to the leftists of those times. The prominent among them were Shiela Bhatia, Shiv Dhan Singh Chauhan and S.H. Raza* who was physically present at the venue when Progressive Artists Association of Kashmir was established. In fact BalrajSahani, the great cine star of Bollywood, also helped the Kashmir Association at that time. Mr. P.N.Kachru, another living witness and a man of significance with regard to the modern art movement in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, corroborates this view. He states that they had meetings with the important personalities of the times. The first was with Sheila Bhatia, a well-known playwright and stage actress of Indian Progressive Theatre Association (IPTA) and S.S.Chauhan, a progressive and prominent Hindi writer. Besides participating in the meetings, both Kaul and Kachru drafted the constitution of the association. No doubt the leftists attempted to incorporate their agenda. But the group did not fully agree with them they partly agreed and partly disagreed. The news of the establishment of Progressive Artist Association of Kashmir was however flashed to artists all over India, especially to those whom the group knew. The news of PAA was communicated to Dr. Mulk Raj Anand as well.

First ever group show of Modern art exhibition: mujahidmanzil Srinagar (Kashmir)

Butt, Kaul and Kachru had also established some direct links with the political elites of those times. The first group-show of modern art in Kashmir was held at MujahidManzil, FatehKadal, Srinagar Kashmir. “Our holding of this exhibition was possible due to the political patronage of the emergency administration in Kashmir during 1948. MaulanaMasoodi was one such political stalwart who inaugurated the exhibition.”¹¹ The participants in this group-show were S.H.Raza, Somnath Butt, P.N.Kachru, and TrilokeKaul. SyeedHyder Raza, who was an alumina of Sir J.J. Collage of Art 1948 and an enthusiastic young artist from Bombay had stayed in the Valley till late autumn of 1948. It was Mr.S.N.Butt, one of the trio who first came into contact with Raza. Raza happened to be an important member of an active group of painters in Bombay. “the explanation we used to give was of course in the language of S.H.Raza saying “Kashmir is beautiful but there is not only the beautiful side of Kashmir. Kashmir is black and ugly also, because an ugly event has happened in Kashmir. So the ugly colours have started pouring into the paintings. Raza used to tell us ‘you do not paint the horse but the horsiness of the horse’ so we used to say that this is the character of Kashmir. This is what has happened in today’s Kashmir”.¹² “S. H. Raza’s company with the group that became responsible in contributing and in equipping the group with the post Impressionist principles of aesthetics which were chiefly charged with concepts of eastern orientalism, with respect for pictorial values as opposed to Naturalism”.¹³

First Art exhibition By Progressive artist association-Srinagar

This first exhibition of Progressive Artist's Association on (20th Jun 1948) "sent shock-waves into the fossilized and archaic sediments of socio-psychic system of so called Kashmiri ethos."¹⁴ Defying the established traditions of the principles of art that were specific to the region and beatific in nature, these artists preferred to delve into the creative realms of expressions that drew inspiration from western philosophy of art. Sudden shift of artistic expression from the concept of pure form to abstraction and its different overtures, a trend that was already in vogue in Europe during that time, generated disinclination and reluctance among those who had come to view the exhibition. Many labeled these artistic expressions as crazy and absurd. ¹⁵

First national level exhibition in New Delhi

Progressive Artist Association held its first national level exhibition in All India Fine Arts and Crafts society at Parliament Street, New Delhi, now located on Rafi Marg. With this "the Association was poised for its projection and propagation at the National level. The first exhibition of the Association was held in New Delhi on 1st of October, 1949 in the old exhibition' hall of All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society' at Parliament Street. With a large gathering and great fanfare the exhibition was inaugurated by Prof. HumanyunKabir, the then Educational Adviser to the Government of India, with active co-operation from the progressive Delhi Silpi Chakra led by BabeshSanyal. The opening of the exhibition was impressive and was well attended by artists, poets, writers, intellectuals and press-columnists"¹⁶ Recollecting some moments of the event both P.N.Kachru and TrilokeKaul individually referred to the help rendered by BaheshSanyal.¹⁷ The print media had covered the exhibition with exhilarating captions and phrases – "most colourful exhibition of the year", "S.N.Butt, the rising star of the East", "the semi-abstract, landscapist and a wizard of colour combinations", "TrilokeKaul, the painter of the mountains and snow-scapes, and a romantic expressionist", "Kachru, the painter of life and people and possessing the qualities of Rembrandesque Monumentalism."¹⁸

First two man show in Bombay

Soon after this, TrilokeKaul and Somnath Butt held a two men show at Bombay Art Society during the winter of 1949. Both were greatly helped by Raza and his friends commonly known as progressive artists group in Bombay. It was a small group of young artists that included Francis Newton Souza, K.H.Ara, S.H.Raza, M.F.Hussain, H.A.Garde and Bakre (the lone sculptor among them). All these men ultimately became the forerunners of the Modern Art movement in India. They had been influenced by European movements of Impressionism and after.

The group aimed at countering the prevalent British academic education in art schools. ChivaxChavada and N.S Bendre were never into this artists group. They were independent artists. Bendre and Hebbbar were associated with the Art Society of India, Bombay, which was an established organisation for promotion of arts. Raza, Souza, K.H.Ara, M.F.Hussain, H.A.Garde and Bakre were patronised by some European corporate executives in Bombay. One of them was "Walter Langhammer" who was an impressionist painter himself.¹⁹ His contribution to the field of creative painting was acknowledged greatly in Bombay circles those days. S.H.Raza literally followed Langhammer, who himself was working in the style of Oscar Kokoschka, a noted impressionist.²⁰

‘UNISECO’ travelling exhibition at Nedus hotel Srinagar (Kashmir)

One of the first important events organised by the Progressive Artists Association was holding of a UNESCO travelling exhibition that had come to India in the form of large actual size prints of the paintings by western masters (to commemorate 50 years of western art-Impressionism & after). Visually these prints looked as good as the originals. The printing quality was so magnificent that one could not only feel the texture but at first sight be tempted to feel the thickness of the pigment. The consignment of these prints was received at Amritsar by P.N.Kachru, a member of the Progressive Artist Association and Kashmir was the last stop of the UNESCO travelling exhibition in India; from here the exhibition was scheduled to go to Pakistan via Amritsar. The exhibition was held in summer of 1950 at Nedou's Hotel banquet hall. Keeping in view the previous experience, the Association took the decision of inviting only a selected gathering of intellectuals connected with our art-activities and a sizeable group of cultural activists, professors, writers and those who had closely associated themselves with our art perceptions".²¹As Nedous Hotel was selected as the venue for UNESCO exhibition, "the premises of this hotel ultimately became the second important location for the Progressive Artist Association to hold Art Exhibitions, first being the Srinagar Club. TrilokeKoul held three solo shows at Nedous. At one of the exhibitions, the group declared that they were opting for a systematic technical training. Dr. MulkRajAnand, a leading art historian and a critic of those days and also the editor of a prestigious art journal 'Marg' had a considerate opinion about the group. In fact, it was Dr. MulkRajAnand's suggestion that TrilokeKaul should acquire technical training at Baroda, as it was an upcoming Institution where the development of inherent talent was a priority rather than thrusting the academic curricula. The system of training there enabled individual talent to grow for the styles of other schools were not thrust on the trainees.

1950-First group show at Parade Ground, Jammu

It was almost around this time that people of Jammu got interested towards such activities in art. Whatever interest the progressive artist association of Kashmir had for Jammu, it was all due to Dr. ApurabSomnath said TrilokeKaul. Elucidating further he revealed that "we held a group show at Parade Ground in Jammu (1950) that was inaugurated by Dr.Karan Singh. ApurabSomnath's home had become a hub of artistic activity that included art, literature and theatre. Somehow when we had the exhibition at parade Ground we came into contact with local painters and I think Master Sansar Chand met me there. V.R. Khajuria met me later in Srinagar. That time he too was doing water colours".²²

Remembering the moments that led to the first group show Shri.P.N.Kachru, another active member of the progressive artist association wrote 'I found a pair of young men who felt like being closer, perhaps for seeking some personal help in getting their difficulties 'of livelihood solved. The two introduced themselves as Vidya Rattan and Chandulal, the former being an employee earning' a sum of 'rupees forty per month as an illustrator in the Agriculture Department, and the later a drawing master working in a school. Vidya Rattan showed an inclination to be in touch with us as he happened to be moving to Srinagar seasonally along with the movement of his office in summer months. Chandulal himself claimed to be the last descendant of the family of famed Seu Raina, who ran for his life into the Pahari principalities

and, through subsequent generations, founded rich movements in Pahari Schools (of miniatures). Chandulal was reduced to a petty imitationist drawing teacher, with no flair or desire for the creators and masters of his bygone dynasty.'

It is during this time that cultural scholarships were announced. Santosh got it in his maiden attempt. Santosh was a graceful friend and man of excellent qualities. We stayed together in the Baroda and shared the scholarship amount that Santosh had received directly under Mr. N.S.Bandre and not through the Fine Arts Department of M.S.University Baroda. He had been quite helpful to me during that period" says Triloke Kaul.

Founding of Academy of Art, culture and Languages

It is due to the die-hard efforts of the artists of 50s who had during the course of time befriended young politicians 'who were later to occupy the high government positions and who because of their empathy for the new art and artists created a conducive climate whereby some artists got official patronage'. Thus the need to establish a nodal organisation to cater to the aspirations of artists, writers and poets, the government of Jammu & Kashmir by proviso to section 146 of the constitution of Jammu & Kashmir did in the year 1958 establish the Academy of Art, Culture & Languages. It was declared to be an autonomous corporate body vide. SRO NO- 340 Dated 14th August, 1963 and was to look after the renaissance, development and preservation of rich cultural heritage embedded in all the three regions of the state. Academy of Art, Culture & Languages was established on the pattern of Lalit Kala Akademi, Sahitya Akademi and Sangeet Natak Akademi at the national level in the country.

As a proactive policy of reviving the age old handicraft industry, Government of Jammu and Kashmir decided to establish a school of design. Concept and subsequent establishment of the center was to boost the quality of the handicrafts. To give this industry an innovative flip, all the eminent creative artists of the times like Triloke Kaul, P.N.Kachru and S.N.Butt were involved and put on official positions in this department.

However to promote 'Modern Art' newly established department of Art, Culture and Languages established Institutes of Music and Fine Arts in 1965 both at Srinagar and Jammu. These twin centers functioned as hobby center for music and fine arts initially but subsequently these Art Institutions were affiliated with the Universities of Jammu and Kashmir around 1974. It is only very recently that these Art Institutes have been freed from the administrative governance of the Academy of Art Culture and Languages and handed over in 2011 to the respective universities of Jammu and Kashmir for their better academics functioning.

It is matter of satisfaction that the Academy of Art, Culture and Languages has over the years been able to build up a rich collection of Modern Art. Over a period of several decades Academy of Art, Culture and Languages has been hosting Art Camps and Workshops as its routine annual activity. Eminent national level artists like Bendre, Swaminathan, Shanko Choudhry, S.H.Raza, Gulam Sheikh, M.F.Hussain, Ramachandran, Ramkumar Balchabda, Manu Parekh, Paramjit Singh, Arpita, S.R.Bushan and many other significant artists have participated in these camps. These masters have not only left behind works of great importance but they have also left tangible impact on the psyche and artistic practice of the state artists. In fact cultural academy as part of the strategy to boost the local artistic talent would invite their participation

also. It is also due to these efforts that the Academy of Art Culture and Languages has over a period of sixty years been able to document all the working modern artists of the state like S.N.Bhat, TrilokKoul, G.R.Santosh, SurajTikoo, Mohan Raina, Nisar Aziz, BansiParimoo, P.N.Kachroo, M.Sadiq and others, the first generation of artists to practice modern art.

It is a fact of history that TrilokeKaul's struggle to achieve academic excellence and his die-hard commitment to attain the highest goal in the Modern Artistic pursuits led him to seek admission in the Department of Painting, M.S.University, Baroda, in the early fifties. His one-man and two men-shows at Jehangir Art Gallery at Bombay opened flood gates for the students from the state of Jammu and Kashmir to this new subject. As a pillar post, TrilokeKaul also served the source of Inspiration for the next generation of artists. Those influenced during early 60s became the future artists of significance to put in their best in the practice of modern art and remained its most enthusiastic practitioners. Among the significant contributors to this trend the names of like BushanKoul, GayoorHussan, KishoriKoul, GokulDembi, A.R.John, Vijay Gupta, V.R. Khajuria, A.K.Raina, Shibam Kaw, RajenderPatwari, T.S.Batra and M.A.Mehboob are quite noteworthy. Most of them got trained at Baroda and thus inherited the richness of expression from N.S.Bendre, K.G.Subramaniam and ShankuChoudry. Possessing great academic skills, some of these artists took the additional responsibility of setting up the two art institutions in Srinagar and Jammu, under the auspices of Cultural Academy. During the decade of 1970 local artists after finishing their academic training in some leading Art Colleges of the country joined these Institutes in the capacity of teachers and instructors in various departments like Painting, Sculpture and Applied arts etc. These included artists like Late Vijay Gupta, V.R Khajuria, Gayoor Hassan, BushanKaul, Abdul Rashid John, GokalDembi, Rajinder Patwari, S.K. Kaw. T.S. Batra and Masood Hussain.

They not only practiced art but taught a number of students who have now turned to be the future contemporary artists like M.K. Bhatt, Vijay Saraf, RajinderTiku, ShaikaMuhi, Shora Bashir, Shuja Sultan, Ashok Mehra, NasreenShazadi, Aftab Ahmed, BushanKesar, Shabir Mirza and many others. Lately artists like ShafiChaman, Harshvardan, RavinderJamwal and others joined the bandwagon and became part of these institutions to contribute activities in the fields of art and its teaching. Significant among the younger generation of practicing artists (most of them trained in the Institutes) are Brij Sharma, Rajeshwar Singh Jamwal, Rakesh Kaul, Raj Singh Jamwal, Upinder Sharma etc.

The Artists of the State today, like their contemporaries elsewhere inside and outside the country, share a totality of human thought, beliefs and accomplishments and their creations (i.e. sculpture, paintings, graphics etc.) are efforts to add new dimensions to our awareness. Their work may reflect an intimate perception of things or larger messages expressed through a visual language which is both individualistic and universal.

Institute of Music and Fine Arts

The Institute of Music and Fine Arts (IMFA) Jammu was established in 1965 by J &K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages as a hobby center for music and fine arts. On popular demand IMFA was affiliated with the University of Jammu in 1974 to start Bachelor Degree Courses in Music and Fine Arts. Since then, IMFA, has trained numerous batches of Music and

Fine Arts graduates who are serving the society in various capacities as teachers in colleges, government and private Institutions, artists/modelers in various govt. depts., designers in advertising industry, art and music directors in television industry and freelance musicians and artists. Our alumni regularly get admission for higher studies in prestigious Institutes like J. J. School of Arts-Mumbai, Shanti Niketan, M.S.University Baroda, Banaras Hindu University, Delhi College of Art, N.I.D., P. G Depts. of Music, Delhi and Punjab Universities. It is also heartening to note that our graduates have won state and national awards and fellowships/scholarships offered by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Lalit Kala Academy and International agencies. We at IMFA, Jammu University feel proud to be involved in sacred pursuit of handing down the ancient tradition of classical music and exploring new vistas in visual arts. The teaching faculty of IMFA, apart from disseminating art and music education, they are also playing an active role in Jammu's civil society by contributing towards aesthetic enrichment of various public institutions and the environment in general.

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- 11 P.N.Kachru, "THE MODERN ART MOVEMENT IN KASHMIR" Neelamatam, vol.2,no.2, November 2004, P 7.
- 12 Reference from the excerpts of the interview held with the living legend and the one of the founder member of Modern Art movement of Kashmir Shri. TrilokeKaul.
- 13 P.N.Kachru, "THE MODERN ART MOVEMENT IN KASHMIR" Neelamatam, vol.2,no.2, November 2004, P 5.
- 14-18 Ibid. pp.6-7
- 19 **Walter Langhammer** Born in Austria. Left Austria during Nazi occupation of World War II. He was a contemporary of the famous painter Oskar Kokoschka, who was professor of

the Academy in Vienna in the 1930s. Langhammer was appointed as the first art director of the Times of India, and later the Chairman of Bombay Art Society. Played a matchless role in bringing art patrons and artists together and a seminal role in the founding the Progressive Arts Group.

Langhammer fell in love with the light and colour of and all the young artists. Here, he would often say, he saw a future in the modern art movement – he felt it was all over Europe. So people like Ara, Raza, Husain, Souza and Raiba, the great names of the Indian Progressive Art Movement, became his students. Every Sunday, it was open house at his studio on Napean Sea Road.

Langhammer inspired a generation of artists who then went on to propel Indian Art onto the international forum. Artists like Almelkar, Husain and Raiba have candidly acknowledged to having drawn inspiration from him. He was not a very prolific painter. Few of his works are in private collections in India.

20 Kokoschka was born in Pöchlarn. His early career was marked by portraits of Viennese celebrities, painted in a nervously animated style. He served in the Austrian army in World War I. 38 i) Reference from the excerpts of the interview held with the living legend and the one of the founder member of Modern Art movement of Kashmir Shri. TrilokeKaul.

21 P.N.Kachru, "THE MODERN ART MOVEMENT IN KASHMIR" Neelamatam, vol.2, no.2, November 2004, P 8.