

INTRODUCTION

Acknowledgement of Printmaking or Graphic art as a medium of fine expression is a recent phenomenon. Its invention was born out of the necessity to reduplicate in large quantity existing religious text. The advantages of a cheap and fast method of duplication was the main consideration then. Therefore Printmaking was initially only a technical facility and text rather than image was the Printed form. Introduction of images into the Printed matters was gradual, so Printmaking as a medium of fine art took a few centuries to evolve. In India Printmaking was introduced more than four centuries back but its potential as medium of expression is only a few decades old. The development of printmaking from a reduplicating medium, to its present status is in itself a vast topic which has already been well researched and documented by Dr. Nirmalendu Das in his thesis, 'The Place of Graphic Arts in Modern Indian Art Movement.'

This thesis deals with the Contemporary scene in Printmaking in India. The main reason behind deliberating choosing the Printmakers of the Graphic Art department of the Faculty of Fine Art, M.S. University of Baroda, to represent the contemporary Printmaking trends in India is that from the time of its establishment in 1950 this department has nurtured and generated many outstanding Printmakers. Their contribution to the Pan-Indian identity is indisputable. Moreover most of these artists are presently practising Printmaking in different parts of the country and therefore their representation is legitimate and undeniable.

So in choosing these artists, the advantage is of confining the study to a comprehensive group. Moreover a study on all the Printmakers from India would be too disparate and time consuming project and may end up as only an extensive documentary evidence of various artists' works. However, there is no dispute about the contribution of other Indian Printmakers

This thesis is not a detailed chronological study of the individual accomplishment of each Printmaker associated with Baroda. It is an attempt to illustrate the contributions that Printmakers from this institute have made towards Modern - Trends of Art. It is an attempt to demarkate the singular features which Identify the works of Printmakers from Baroda.

It is natural that working concentrically on a topic for a certain time, makes one extremely sensitive to all the polemics and issues which may regulate it. During the course of working on this particular topic there have been periods of intense absorption along with periods when views and opinion seemed to stagnate. There have been periods when everything seemed wholistic - causes, reasons, approaches and assumptions, seemed to depend on just one single view point. It is the Paradoxes which appear suddenly from documented material which actually helped in the development of ideas. For contradictions and paradoxes always jolts one out of a compliancy of feeling that one has seen and examined everything. And this helps more than any time consuming detailed analysis, to realise that nature of things and events are not in black and white, that there are interventions of greys which have innumerable tones - the finding of each of which can revitalise and resensitise.

So where does one begin or end in such discourses. Since nature of things which occur spontaneously and naturally are multilayered; each of which can give multifarious meanings, where does one commence? To look for the beginning would only entail a rediscovery of many more 'layers' would it not? This inquiry however, started at what was thought to be the beginning.

The initial interest in this study was focused on the fact that all the Printmakers who complete their training from this department seem to develop extremely individualistic

manner of expression. This was particularly obvious in all the exhibitions of their works such as the Annual show at the end of every academic year or in any other exhibition which has a representation of works of these artists. This observation seemed to denote that every Printmaker from this department developed a unique, individual expression, totally different from everybody else.

Whether each and every Printmakers work is totally different from another and if so how does each artist evolve such an individual manner of expression? Such questions led to extensive documentation of their work. Since most of them have settled in different regions all over the country, this entailed travelling, interviews, and photographic documentation of a cross-section of their work. The study could have ended at this point - with observations on individual development of each artist. Certainly the quantity of material gathered at this point was enough. However it is from this extensive data collection that certain unique features were noticed, which necessitated a further inquiry.

Unlike in many other institutions, the Graphic Arts Department grants complete freedom to its students to develop their own language of expression. There is no compulsion for anybody to follow a style approved by its teachers. There is no such style. Individual capacity is encouraged, there is no unspoken yet acknowledged 'correct' manner of expression towards which a Printmakers expression might be manoeuvred. Therefore every year within every batch, each student gradually develops his particular oeuvre

These students join the department at the Post-graduation or Post-diploma level. They came from different colleges from all parts of the country and can be therefore said to represent a cross-section of various regional trends of India. It is also obvious that at this point most of them seem to have developed their language of expression - according to their own exposure to academic training in the institution or region they hail from.

In the two years, of their training and due to the exposure to the liberal atmosphere in Baroda, they are free to interact amongst themselves. This point of contact broadly results in either-

that the re-establish or emphasis on their already developed language and continue their work in their chosen manner.

Or that they feel a necessity to try out something novel in response to their new environment. The freedom to choose allows them to open up, to imbibe.

Gradually within a span of two year they develop very singular individualistic expression. Such evolvments continue year after year within every batch. However, when their works are considered comparatively, it is impossible to negate the subtle similarities which automatically appear within a group of artist working together in a particular time, in shared circumstances.

Printmaking as a technique and medium of expression, thrives in a conducive-workshop like atmosphere. There are mutual exchanges and any singular feature in any one artist work is noticed and discussed. In this thesis, there is an attempt to study these similarities and exchanges and to see if any patterns or structure automatically emerges out of such spontaneity and how and why does it occur. And if this is a correct assumption how does it contribute to the identity of Contemporary Art of India. Individual expression is the main feature in the works of these artist. There is no obvious typical manner of expression. So this should mean that there are no common points of contact' for comparison. Yet inspite of this the works of these Printmakers is singular compared to most of the works of other Printmakers from India. Therefore there has to be some subtle qualities which demarkate their works and grant them this status. This study tries to identify these features and understand the implication of such an observation.

Printmaking as a fine-art has only recently asserted its validity as a medium of expression in India. It is not justifiable to discuss it only as an interesting technique with many possibilities. All visual-art mediums rely on techniques to some extent. Until very recently many discussions on Printmaking in any art-journal or publication only emphasised the technical variations possible. It was felt that without explaining the basic difference between Painting and Printing it was not possible to discuss the works. No doubt this over-emphasis on technicality helped in pointing out the unique features of the medium, to the layman, but in the process the artistic expression was sidelined. In this thesis therefore there has been no attempt to write in detail about the various technical possibilities in the medium. Rather it is a comparative analysis of the creative expression. Therefore the attempt is to project the Qualitative and Quantitative possibilities so that Printmaking can be regarded at par with other medium of fine art.

The first chapter deals with a brief historical background of the development of this medium of expression in different parts of the world. This provides a base for any further study and at the same time, there is an attempt to point out the unique characteristics of Printing. The development of Printing techniques is coordination of socio-economic, geographic and political circumstances. The changes that this medium has undergone from a reduplicating one to a fine expression is pointed out.

The second chapter deals with Printmaking in India, prior to independence, with an emphasis on the role played by educational institutions. This phase of roughly 100 years prior to 1947, has seen many changes in all mediums of expression, including Printmaking. The contribution of several artists towards this is duly noted. The third chapter deals with the establishment of the Faculty of Fine Arts, the Graphic Arts department as well as the works of art in the first two decades that is from 1950 to 1970. Their work provides a base for the Printmakers of the next two decades and the identity of contemporary

Printmaking evolves from here onwards. The fourth chapter deals with the work of Printmakers from the Graphic Arts Department. It is an analysis and comparative study of the works which helps to bring out the unique features in their expression. The concluding chapter attempts to show that the typical features that have been discussed in the chapters prior to it are unique and these contribute to the identity of Modern-Trends in Indian art. Some of the questions dealt there are - Given the freedom on individual development in the department, do these features noted above generate any linguistic tradition in Printmaking? Is this confined to Baroda or does this have a wider connotation? How does all this contribute towards Contemporary Trends of Art ? Are there any universal implications to this. If so what are they and how does it relate to international trends.

As this is one of the first extensive study on contemporary Printmaking, there have been some problems. For eg. reliance on personal accounts of artist instead of data or information already documented and published, since no comprehensive publication exists on the material needed. Thus a single event or a piece of information, may have been relayed in several versions from several sources. At times there was negative response from an artist unwilling to communicate due to loss of material like old prints or portfolios. All these led to shortcomings in complete documentation. It has been necessary to provide a large number of visual evidence to support the hypothesis and conclusions drawn in this study. However they are not the sum total of works produced in the decades to which this study is confined. There are many more. Only those prints have been used which illustrate a point. Therefore if any artist work is not well represented, it is not because the works fell short of any personal evaluation, rather they did not fit into the hypothesis indicated.

It is also necessary to emphasise that the way the works are interpreted and analysed, may be totally different from what the artist intended. However, these views have evolved

from a comparative study of total works produced over quite a few years, where as the artists concern is with the evolvement of his/her personal language. So there is bound to be a difference. But such differences do not negate the importance of either interpretation. This study should therefore be considered as an interpretation drawn from collective works over a large period. It is not the only interpretatin but one of the interpretation possible.