

SYNOPSIS

A CRITICAL STUDY OF MODERNITY IN THE ART OF SOUTH INDIA WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO MADRAS SCHOOL: 60S AND 70S

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The Madras Art Movement was a regional phenomenon, which began forming its special characteristic from mid 40's in initiating search for authenticity in modernism rooted in its region's cultural heritage. The College of Arts and Crafts [a colonial period established art institution] became the locus for the emergence of this movement in the South in the 60s. The configuration of the art movement had been initiated under the tenure of D.P. Roy Chowdhary the first Indian artist principal [1930-1957] who had laid emphasis on the development of fine arts curriculum, put forth an empirical and perceptual approach to art and axed the colonial pedantry of human form study based on regurgitated classical statuary. These were considered sweeping innovations, since the school's curriculum had privileged craft teaching until the date of Roy Chowdhary's appointment as administrative head in 1930. With Roy Chowdhary charting a trajectory that would lead to the development and growth of potential artists was critical for the school. These ideas in the 50s needed to be extended. And K.C.S. Paniker who was the next administrative head brought in a study of modernist expression of European masters. The pedagogy subscribed by Paniker opened up avenues, for technical and expressive creative explorations that became the hallmark of the school contributing towards the enhancement of the art movement in Madras.

The forces gathering momentum for the development of modern art movement in South, particularly Post-Independence, could be related/ascribed to certain contingent factors prevailing within the country. . This was the demand for 'authenticity' in its visual language leading to 'construction' of an Indian identity. The thrust towards this could largely be directed at hegemonic internationalism necessitating the change in adopting a posture of difference by Indian artists to reduce similarities with post painterly abstraction practiced by majority of them in late 50s. K.C.S. Paniker who cleverly melded western modernist technical innovations with the cultural traditions of Indian arts and crafts largely met the exigencies of the moment.

Though these factors were critical in directing the efforts for the growth and development of the Madras art movement, more crucially it was the College of Arts and Crafts that became the site for its emergence in the South. For within the institution K.C.S. Paniker gathered around him a band of talented, intelligent and committed students with whom he held debates, discussions and lively arguments and extended the same with teacher artists like S. Dhanapal, Munuswamy, A.P. Santhanaraj among others concerning the status of modern art within the country.

The denominating title 'Madras' though specifically refers to the city of Madras, the present day Chennai then was a gravitating center, to which primarily artists from all the four Southern states, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka converged, determining its artistic contours. This was the only government institution for providing instructions in fine arts in the region till mid 1970's. This accounted for the majority of the artists from the four states gravitating here; and each of these artists carried his cultural sensibility that they brought to bear upon their works. These diverse conditions and factors enabled Paniker to charter a new trajectory effectively aided and supported by his position as the head of the institution, the infrastructure, and the resources of his colleagues and students.

The aim of the thesis is to study various contingent factors that gave rise to the emergence of the Madras Art Movement as it developed within this institution in the decade of late 50s and 60s, and the attempt made to make itself visible from the Southern periphery. The emergence of the art movement also problematizes the growing debate on the regional modern, consequent to an agenda, which privileged an adherence to and valorization of local culture. This art movement had a character and identity, which though consanguine in many respect to the modern Indian art, was different and distinct as far as its development was concerned.

The title of my thesis encircles modernity and it is within this framework that an attempt will be made to posit the Madras Group, weaving modernism as a conceptual category into the tradition or cultural art forms of the Southern region. This process will allow a focus on articulation of difference of character of the Southern region into the national mainstream. The ambivalence of tradition and modernity, on the strength of which the movement acquires identity is problematized to open up space that will reflect regional bias. This will serve as a crucial factor in defining the Madras Art Movement. Modernism as a historical phenomenon of the Twentieth

century also has valence within the Indian context though its assimilation is only emblematic. Modernity has been defined as the set of philosophical, ethical, political attitudes and factors that enabled its establishment, which in India was the process of modernization as part of social, economic, political and cultural institutions that enabled the agenda of modernism.

CHAPTER I: CULTURAL POLITICS AND COLONIAL PEDAGOGY is a study of the process of modernization set in momentum by the British imperialists. The initiation of this process through introduction of various measures including art education and the establishment of art schools in the mid nineteenth century made education a powerful discourse within colonialism, since its success was largely based on what was taught to the colonized and how it was taught. The establishment of art schools created sites where ideas about art were worked out and disseminated.

The ambitious art policy of the British Raj had much to do with the rapid spread of “academic art” in colonial India, and art schools served as agents of the Raj, seeking to inculcate “good taste” in its subject. In the 1850s, of the manifold channels of westernization, art schools indirectly controlled by Departments of Public Instructions emerged as uniquely powerful. James Mill, author of ‘History of British India’ had a definite influence in shaping the government art policies. His differentiation between ‘art’ which required the exercise of intellect and ‘craft’ which only required ‘skill’, along with the judgment that the traditional artists in India had no scientific knowledge of the language of art, and were therefore, unable to create illusion of nature’ were the two basic determinants in shaping the curriculum of the art schools till 1890s. The first Western art school was founded by the British resident Sir Charles Malet at Pune in 1798; and in Madras, the School of Industrial Arts was established in 1850 as a private enterprise by the resident surgeon Dr. Alexander Hunter. And it is this school, which served as the model for both Calcutta [1854] and Bombay [1857].

With the setting up of first British art schools, the 1850s witnessed a new systematized phase of colonial intrusion and involvement in the sphere of arts and crafts. The scheme of art education in India was by and large in the direction of the revival of its traditional crafts and skills.

The art school that was founded in Madras on 1st May 1850, by the resident surgeon, Dr. Alexander Hunter, as a personal venture was later taken over by the government. The original intentions of Hunter, was to bring the humanizing quality of fine arts to the natives, so that they

could improve their skills in the manufacture of domestic articles. Within the context of colonialism the Madras School of Arts and Crafts emerged as a site for the development of art establishment around the middle of the nineteenth century. This school in the 1960's became pivotal in the emergence of a modern movement namely the Madras Art Movement. Since this was the only prestigious art institution and a recognized government body, artists from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh gravitated here from 1940s onwards. The school has been sufficiently historicized to afford an analysis for taking on a different trajectory compared to Bombay and Calcutta.

Hunter administered the art school in Madras from 1850-1873, which remained craft oriented as late as 1920's, closely linked as it was to local industries. After Hunter's retirement in 1873, the next superintendent E.B. Havell, the British art teacher was appointed from England. One of the striking features of Havell's scheme of reform was its lack of interest in the development of 'fine arts'. To Havell in the 1880s, the importance of the artist lay primarily in the sphere of design and craftsmanship essentialising the identity of the Indian artist as craftsman, and privileged crafts over art wherein also rested the main responsibilities of the British government in India.

The last Englishman to administer the college was W.S. Hadaway and his imminent retirement initiated a search for a new head. The first Indian Superintendent after Hadaway's retirement in November 1929 was Rao Bahadur N.R. Balakrishnan Mudaliar. His retirement in May 1930 brought D.P. Roy Chowdhary on the scene and he was made the first Indian artist principal. His headship negotiated the position of the school with healthy implication towards Fine Arts section. System of examination and promotion was introduced in 1932 and eventually the proposal was accepted for awarding diplomas to the students who completed their training and passed the examination. D.P. Roy Chowdhary reformed the school that stopped being an institution for future drawing teachers and manufactory of exotic craft products and turned it into a school for creative artists.

K.C.S. Paniker who became the next principal in 1957 initiated a different pedagogical approach based on the study of 20th century European stylistic movement. His travels and exhibitions abroad and the critical comments directed towards his works, led to an introspection of turning to indigenous and regional resources as a point of reference in his art. What is manifestly important

is that Paniker when he took over the mantle from D.P. Roy Chowdhary chartered a trajectory that was to have implications in the growth and development of the art movement in Madras. Paniker, it should be stressed, was the lone voice from the South who attempted to bridge and bring the Madras artists on the national scene.

CHAPTER II: NEGOTIATING THE SELF: IN QUEST OF IDENTITY: DEFINING THE REGIONAL MODERN

In this chapter an attempt is made to analyze the three problematic dimensions inflecting the Southern art movement.

- a. The definition of 'regional modern' within 'national modern'.
- b. The binaries of center/periphery inscribed in the power play at Delhi in which the representation from the South [periphery] was minimal.
- c. The ambivalence consequent to the agenda incorporating tradition with modernity in its art practice.

The Post-Independence phase was marked by a creative introspection. Many involved and dedicated artists' felt that validity of their art could have valency, if Indian ethos combined with useful experiences of western modern art. This opened the question of researching Indian tradition and [re] constructing Indian ethos and authenticity in order to identify itself within mainstream internationalism. Simultaneously the late 50s also witnessed an artistic crisis across the country. The crisis refers to the nagging question of authenticity and the search for identity within the post-colonial experience, whose pre-condition in art circuits was based on widely accepted internationalism. The crisis urged artists across the country to rethink and redefine their ideology, which could neither be a return to older Revivalist style, themes or content, nor a blind following of internationalism. Against this emergent milieu, the Madras Group attempted intensive soul searching in order to become nationally visible and establish its identity as an independent regional movement. This move became opportune for the Madras Group necessitated and conditioned by the question/problem of marginalisation leading eventually towards defining the notion of regional modern in the South. The application of the appellant 'tradition' will acquire new meaning and depth within the Southern region as culture was sourced for different purpose and intent. In the South, the artistic ideology to define its practice was at tandem with Dravidian culturalism in which the visibility of its varied art forms was privileged in conjunction with modernity to realize its aims.

The Madras Art Movement was a regional phenomenon starting in mid 1940s, which began forming its specific characteristic features during the second half of 1950s and early 60s. With K.C.S. Paniker in painting and S. Dhanapal in sculpture as its leading figures they pushed their initiatives in search for an authentic modernism rooted in the region's cultural heritage by becoming the torchbearers of this new direction. The regional characteristic and content in these, which can be described as the making of a special case of 'regional modernism' in art as distinct from the national and international modernism/s was the result of formidable young talents that gathered here. Paniker with his teacher-artists colleagues along with other ex-students formed a cohesive group, and held meaningful dialogues, discussions and debates in the late 50s and early 60s. Thus the agenda of 'regionalism' or/and 'nativism' became operational in the post-independence milieu. Nativism or indigenism in the Madras Art Movement inevitably became a product of collective and intentional experiments with modernism, which led to its definition of regional identity, helping to configure its artistic expression.

Within the discourse of modern Indian art and particularly during the nationalist struggle tradition and modernity were constantly repositioned. Echoes of similar situation post-Independence become relevant to the Madras Group. And within the Madras experience the twin concepts of tradition and modernity need reevaluation within this context.

The interplay of tradition and modernity provided the framework for the Madras artists. This ambivalence/dichotomy was unavoidable implicating the process of researching classical and vernacular ethnic forms with wider significance within the paradigm of modernism. For the Madras group modernism involved simultaneously an anti modern return to nativist origins. This opens the question to 'primitivism' with regional invocations and as a site for asserting authenticity. In aligning primitivism to the nativist agenda it was primarily to valorize those Dravidian art forms belonging to the tribal and folk arts that colonizers had marginalized as 'low art'. Unlike the European use of the ideology or concept of Primitivism, in the particular instance of the Madras Art Movement the attempted establishment of relations between the episteme or the question of primitivism and nativism, allows for a site to negotiate and assert identity. In their creative appropriation they evoke those characteristics of simplicity, unsophistication, boldness, iconicity, frontality, effulgent colours and power of subjectivity.

Besides constructing tradition and appropriating modernity, the contestation of identity also focused on the binaries of center and periphery. And it is precisely this factor, which made palpable the question of identity for the southern artists located at Madras within the institutional framework of the art college. The Southern art movement, fundamentally established on its artistic culture was to negotiate an identity not through separation from the center, but within it to mark a posture of difference. As the decades of 40s and 50s marched ahead, there appeared artists on the front lines of modern Indian art from Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta. Within this artistic circuit, there were no artists from beyond the vindhya, particularly Madras whose voices could be heard. Relatively the posture of Bombay and Delhi as the commercial hub and political epicenters respectively had their constructive roles defined. Madras from the colonial period was not strategically located to be within the center's ambit and perennially remained a region 'beyond the Vindhya'. With no crucial role either economically or politically it remained at the periphery. And this situation had been prevailing from pre-independence phase when socio-politico-economic contingencies in South during nationalist movement had also engendered a rift, suspicion and separatist agenda to operate successfully among the natives [ethnic Dravidians] in order to undermine the potency of the nationalist struggle and hence create space that would allow an identity for them on their terms.

The Consideration of these various factor and tangentially the identity crisis within the country then, the Madras Group effected an identity to define the emergence of the Madras Art Movement and simultaneously made their presence felt at the national level as a heterogeneous group from the South with a common goal and an agenda effectively worked out by artists who though pursuing creative freedom in their works were bound by commonality of their regional traditions. Paniker, it should be stressed, was the lone voice from the South who attempted to bridge and bring the Madras artists on the national scene.

The contribution of K.C.S. Paniker was seminal towards the emergence of the Madras Group at the national level and shaping the configuration of the modern art movement in the South.

Chapter III: The Decade of the 60s: K.C.S. Paniker and the Madras Art Movement details the contribution of this artist in the formulation of his individuated style and diverse other activities that made possible the Southern modern art movement. Initially the avowed internationalism practiced by the artists of the 50's had become problematic and gradually a

consciousness had developed amongst them and the intelligentsia consequent to the consolidation of third world realities. This consciousness encouraged an artistic response to read tradition to make claims of authenticity – cultural, regional and national via the modernist notions of subjectivity as in creative freedom

After the retirement of D.P. Roy Chowdhary in 1957, Paniker took over the mantle. The personal and modernist approach to art education that he introduced made significant impact within the School of Arts. Paniker's disillusionment with contemporary scenario called forth the need for a self search going beyond modernist formulae and turn towards traditional sources for redefining the modernist idiom. The Madras group consciously attempted a regional vocabulary in terms of folk arts and crafts, forms of accoutrements derived from performing arts like Kathakali, Theyyam as also the high pictorial tradition of South Indian arts.

Paniker's educative sojourns abroad precipitated the turn to indigenism. While in London, an exhibition of his paintings [1954] had provoked a remark from a critic that was to result in approximating ideas, forms and imagery from local/regional sources. This would entail his emergence as a leading torchbearer for 'Indianness' in concurrence with his colleagues and a band of young talented students to support, reinforce and augment his ideas towards the quest for an Indian identity subsumed within regional modern. It is this core group, which gave birth to the Madras Art Movement.

Paniker whose role had been instrumental in putting forth ideas about one's own culture to serve as source for reference, started his artistic journey in the 40s by recording the pristine world of light, colours and forms mediated through watercolours. In the early 50's he directed his attention to the study of Indian pictorial and plastic arts. As he attempted a departure from mimetic aspect of his art/representations, he was searching for a mode that would associate his figurative composition to a larger spirit of design namely the picture surface only. In this effort he was informed in his experimentations by the works of Jamini Roy whose influence on Paniker was seminal. It provided a thrust for evolving and advancing his personal idiom of the human form with new values added to flatness. What Paniker essentially implicated was the strength of Indian traditional heritage that could be moderated with a renewed vigour.

The cultural awareness and the social milieu, which grounded Paniker in the 60's, enabled support that was both intellectual and artistic from artists in Madras emerging from the institutional matrix of the School of Arts with shared art education. In his avowed statement of an art 'Indian in spirit and worldwide contemporary' Paniker was integrating and weaving tradition into modernity. Paniker's figurative experimentations and design oriented space exploration precipitated in abstraction. This was a struggle for dematerialization of his figurative mode into cryptic linear rhythms that led to creating his celebrated series of "WORDS AND SYMBOLS". He explored this tract from 1963 until his death in 1977.

Thus Paniker's breakthrough in his Words and Symbols mark the final achievement of his career. It was a method of patterning gesturing towards reductivity and two-dimensionality. And he had few followers from the rest of the country because of the north south divide. Paniker in his breakthrough series mutated and played with his basic concepts derived from vernacular repertoire [archetypal goddess images, snake forms, linga, kolam designs etc.] and mathematical configurations to armour his expressions.

Words and symbols that Paniker abstracted from material context of life namely charts, notebook scribbles, mathematical formulae, cultural objects, everyday objects and especially language, invited viewer's attention to these mundane forms, having made them as cryptic formulae that defined the structured and meticulously organized space. This inflects Paniker's avant gardism with regional specificity and its problematic identity with his crucial intervention in the 60s. His first painting that envisages the use of scripts and pictographic elements was "THE FRUIT SELLER" in 1963. This vital work of Paniker fragmented and loosely organized compositionally may not possess an aesthetic value in its play of elements, but these considerations were marginalized to prioritize his creative experimentations in this transitional composition. Paniker's invention of this visual grammar was the *raison d'etre* of his intellectuality and aesthetics. He finally achieved this decorative patterning – a move, which led him through diverse experimentations and sourcing indigenist mines to collapse his Indian spirit with modern sensibility.

The period of early 60's was also a trying one for the Madras artists. Patronage was few and far between. A lack of contemporary art awareness was a glaring lacuna in Madras. This has been explained by the conservative and orthodox mindset and a terrain that is a stronghold of tradition

where dance and music find great favour than visual arts of painting and sculpture – a field that remained elusive and enigmatic beyond comprehension. Within such a milieu it was difficult for the creative artists with all their exciting adventures in modern art to find an appreciative patron. It posed a serious threat as a profession for many a heady youths because of its non-economic viability. Many who graduated were absorbed as art teachers in schools, designers in Weavers Service center, or as finishing artist in commercial art establishment. In this dismal scenario what was required was a proactive solution and Paniker stepped in to solve the problem to a large extent.

On the Corommandal coast, six miles south of Madras 8.05 acres of land were acquired in April 1966, and Paniker's brainchild came into existence - THE CHOLAMANDAL ARTIST VILLAGE. With the birth of this concept of an artist village, Paniker had set himself and the group on the path of bold experimentation. Cholamandal was a vision of Paniker where artists as a commune would live together to foster the spirit of artistic brotherhood and collective organization. The concept of an artists' commune, indigenist in its value and traditional in its perspective reinforced Paniker's visionary quality. Cholamandal was a boon realizing the career of many young talents that otherwise would have been lost in banality of proletariat existence.

CHAPTER IV, THE LINEAGE OF ABSTRACTION WITHIN THE MADRAS ART MOVEMENT: 60'S AND 70S.

Within the Madras Art Movement it is possible to draw out two broad specific areas within which the artists visualized their creative temper. This was the 'figurative' and the 'abstract' mode. And within the Madras artistic circuit these two strands of stylistic representations though not dominantly marked are visible enough to make this distinction. The artists who made abstraction their vocabulary were foremost among them L. Munuswamy, K.V. Haridasan [his tantric formulations], V. Viswanathan, K. M. Adimoolam, P. Gopinath, Achuthan Kudallur and the graphic artist RM. Palaniappan. The abstraction that these artists practiced had a range from international to national to regional.

From early 1920 onwards the impact of European Modernism had been felt on Indian art scene in the cubists works of Gaganendranath Tagore. Until the 40s abstraction as a language remained unfavoured by majority of artists. This was due to nationalist agenda taking priority. However abstraction made its forceful intervention in the mid 50s within the Indian situation

when Indian artist returned from their European sojourn and with their experiences attempted to mould the post-independence artistic milieu.

L. Munuswamy, a senior artist after Paniker, was a seminal art practitioner within the Madras Art Movement. In analyzing the crucial role played by Munuswamy it is important to contextualise him in relation to Paniker's espousal of nativism. Munuswamy in his search and exploration of modernity was equal to Paniker, and yet differed substantially from latter's preoccupation with tradition. The abstraction that he created had an international character, particularly his affinity to Abstract Expressionism although this was emphatically manifest in its gestural language.

The most programmatic and a compelling project in the 60s in search for national and cultural identity was Neo-Tantric Art a term that was coined to denote a form of abstraction developed by a small group of Indian artists, particularly Shankar Palsikar, K.V. Haridasan, Om Prakash, Prafulla Mohanty, Biren De and Ghulam Rasool Santosh.

For K.V. Haridasan moving and exploring the terrain of the *Tantric* ritualistic cult was not pedagogic but an inheritance that was not only cultivated but also a dimension of the collective subconscious. Crucially Haridasan was the only internationally acclaimed artist of the Madras Movement to have intellectualized an esoteric cult and suitably adapted to meet the contemporary criteria with his modern sensibility. Haridasan categorically defined his visual language of tantra art as specific to the South and particularly to his home state of Kerala, wherein from a young age he was actively involved in these rituals with his father. His concepts were based on the panchbutas and the Brahmasutra.

V. Viswanathan's contribution within the Madras Art Movement was different and significant. His presence on the campus of the art institution when the debate on nativism was going on made him also an active participant with his polemical and radical views on art situation within the country. Categorically defining his body as a yantra [geometric diagram] with finite limitations, Viswanathan conflated his 'self' i.e. the body identifying it with his canvas. Through this ideology he transposed his personality into the work. His conceptual tantric derivatives were consanguine with the abstraction practiced by the Neo-Tantric painters within the rest of the country but his creative formulations remained distinctly different. This was because he consciously avoided symbols and formulae directly derived from tantric philosophy as G.R.

Santosh and Biren De had employed. This perhaps distinguishes the works of Viswanathan and Haridasan from the other practitioners of the same movement thus reinforcing their regional sensibility within the Madras Art Movement.

Another eminent artist within the Madras Art Movement, K.M. Adimoolam is well known for his black and white ink drawings as well for his abstractions that mark his signature style. A shift was marked in his experimental vision of painting when he consciously adopted the metaphor of nature to create his abstractions. On the other hand the aesthetic of P. Gopinath's art was grounded in structured colours and planar forms derived from his experiences of life, cultural matrix and the plenitudes of nature. The nativist agenda or indigenism that had informed the Madras Art Movement was implicated in the early works of Gopinath, but as he moved ahead and defined his terrain, he also brought to bear upon it the myriad influences of the Eastern and Western art. Achuthan Kudallur like Paniker, Gopinath or Viswanathan was not far in his ideology of expressing cultural values internalized in the sights and sounds of his native hometown of Kerala. His mental landscape was crowded with childhood memories of his home near the river. The experiences of the performance of magical rituals accompanied by the chanting of mantras and the rhythmic drumming in the fire light; the exorcism of the spirit with its quaint dance and eerie sounds; the festivals, and the *Kathakali* dances were mental images that Achuthan now recapitulates and essentialises to work as his abstract vocabulary translated as colored shapes and forms. The unique painted surface organized without reference to representation but rather to correspondences of cultural signs [performing arts, rituals, worships etc] became the determinant for Achuthan's abstractions.

Rm. Palaniappan's interest in the intangible and abstract dimension of space – to explore and make it a living element of his art- dictated the necessity of comprehending the mechanical apparatus of flying machines. His predilection in abstract concepts was directed towards the intangible concepts of time, space and movement transcending the material manifestation of science and technology.

Palaniappan's artistic statements makes relevant his deployment of words, symbols and numbers, a tradition deep rooted within the art institution from the regime of Paniker. Palaniappan's aesthetics was a challenging interface between perception and cognition leading towards an abstraction of the art image and a conceptual presentation of psychological processes. His

conceptual approach explored the complex relations between perception [time], memory [space] and identity.

CHAPTER V: HUMAN BODY AS A DOMINANT TROPE: ART IN THE 60S AND 70S

In Indian traditional/classical culture, the human form has been reserved as a centrality in its varying formations as metaphor, sign and symbol. Its articulation always remained in a state of flux becoming a ubiquitous phenomenon in visual art from sacred to profane to narration in epics and myths.

The human figure was a dominant motif for a large number of artists, an engagement that assisted their expressions. The senior most artists amongst the Madras Group in late 50s and early 60s were J. Sultan Ali, K. Sreenivasulu, M. Redappa Naidu, A.P. Santhanaraj Anthony Doss and Alphonso Arul Doss. Of the first three artists Sultan Ali and Sreenivasulu were contemporaries of Paniker while Redappa Naidu was the student of the latter. In analyzing the figurative compositions of the first three artists, what becomes manifest in their body of works was the dominance of the folk/tribal inspired imagery. Consequently reinventing the art language of tradition and folk arts specifically for this purpose not only provided flexibility for the artists' but also became a measure for negotiating their creative statements. Cultural specificity in this particular instance had the resonance of emotions and experiences from these cultural products.

The impetus to explore the folk was inbuilt in modernism and in India too the artists recognized the value of this tradition in exploring their modernity. Jamini Roy, the Bengal artist was an initiator in this direction whose primitivism made a consistent ideological statement. It was not blind imitation; but by structurally gleaning the visual principles, figures and motifs from folk and tribal art forms it precipitated in inscribing their modern experiences as contemporary expressions. The folk derived art in its most attenuated and highly elaborate form was seen particularly in the oeuvre of Sreenivasulu who could be characterized as the 'Jamini Roy of the South'. While Redappa Naidu's derivative was more iconic in the nature of identifiable deities like 'devi' or 'ganesha' Sultan Ali's imagery was particularly inspired from the tribal arts of Bastar in Madhya Pradesh.

His grotesque imagery had precedents in Indian artistic tradition where bestiality and monstrous imagery prevailed within the sanctity of sacred architecture. Authenticity in this respect to Ali's imagery proved productive at a moment when regionalism in Modern Indian art was defining itself. He abstracted from the tribal vocabulary the concept of "energy" that became a defining mark of his oeuvre. Since the imagery of Sultan Ali was a consequence of his studied efforts in tribal art forms he imbued his imagery with *rasa*, the potential of aesthetic experience, particularly those of 'Bhayanak' or fearsome and 'Vir' or the heroic emotions. The valorization of tribal art forms was further reinforced by the deployment of these *bhavas* or emotions presenting objective correlatives of emotional experiences. Indigenism therefore inscribed his art when he consciously channalized dimensions of Indian aesthetics to powerfully become visual metaphors. They were his visual statements, which by constant deployment had become synonymous with his personality

The place of K.Sreenivasulu within the Madras Art Movement is paradoxical. He was an artist who was a peer of Paniker when they graduated in 1941 and both then went their separate ways. It was this artist who consciously adopted the regional folk idiom despite being academically trained and exposed to western art and modernist formulae. He was already on a path that Paniker after a tremendous struggle would lead the group of artists while Sreenivasulu self-consciously had adopted this mode of expression without external stimuli or exhortation to introspect on the tradition. A simple vision and naive expressions characterized his works. Sreenivasulu's vision was translated through cultural grids namely the Lepakshi experience, the Thanjavur and Sigiriya frescoes, the primitive vocabulary in Jain miniatures and the immediate precedent of the works of Jamini Roy. The structured formulations of his compositions that were his highly personalized statements had a quality of insistent movement and were not static or rigid as it was with Jamini Roy.

M. Redappa Naidu's art was born out of restlessness with his inquiry based on tradition and its productive adaptation and reinterpretation within the modern paradigm. This ambivalence of tradition and modernity was crucial for him since his rootedness within a culture that had one of the longest civilizations. In this respect his sensibility, personal vision, conscious imagery and inner search distinguished his art within nation's mainstream. His place within the Madras Art Movement is influential to the same degree as Paniker's was with his contribution of the Words and Symbol series. After visually, materially, optically researching the extrinsic dimensions of

life he was exploring sites that would add a dimension to modern Indian art. And crucially this was his encounter with the icons intimately associated with religious practices and worships leading to his Deity series [1963-1970]. Moving forth he also mediated through myths and epics making possible the translation of his concepts concerning politics of vision of the Indian culture. His experimentation with icons made Redappa realize that he was venturing into a territory that in modern Indian art had not been trespassed for artistic mediation. He was attempting to project a sacred image into a secular domain. And by employing the sacred image in this manner he was democratizing it with a secular strain. By transcending the sanctity Redappa Naidu reified it to serve his cause of artistic deviation – a preoccupation that remained with him.

Santhanaraj like Munuswamy and other artist teachers within the institution delved into creative technical explorations, with zest, enthusiasm and passion for art. Along with his colleagues at the Art Institution he was also instrumental in injecting momentum into the indigenous agenda that defined and developed the Madras Art Movement. His significance as a teacher and artist equals Paniker and Munuswamy. His compositions have pastoral themes in which the figure of the woman plays a central role. Largely the compositions have single figures and very rarely did he evolve paintings that had groups. His affinity in this direction bears relevance to the works of Munuswamy, among others to mobilize the female form as a vehicle to bear the weight of his subjectivity. His rendering and delineation of them particularly in his drawings exhibit primeval characteristics bordering on expressionist distortions. In paintings, the forms are essentially reductive and attenuated; projecting a modern vision and experiences but with affinity to regional folk arts in particular its stridency, boldness and an iconic frontality. Santhanaraj's originality and novel approach to picture making is identified in this area. In the tradition of the Madras Art Movement his works mark a different signpost.

Anthony Doss emerges from within the Madras Art Movement to inscribe a different narrative. That is he is an artist who was actively engaged with nativist agenda in consonance with his colleagues and students. In addition, he was equally exposed to the modernist European styles, but gradually he moved away from all these activities to mark his return to a style that could be described as 'Neo-Academic Realism'. This reaction partially is self-explanatory, the reason for which was the his unhappiness and dissatisfaction with Paniker after the establishment of the Cholamandal Artist Commune and its related legalities. Because of this Anthony Doss set his

artistic gaze towards a style that Paniker strongly wanted to axe and also to have no residual remains either. This essentially was the empiricist-perceptual approach much favoured by D.P. Roy Chowdhary for whom Doss manifested immense respect. These deep psychological reactions get inflected as protests and disagreement to chart a personal trajectory that would be in direct opposition to Paniker's vision. And Doss in early 70s was disillusioned enough to strike his independent path and turned towards academic realism to define his style and mark it as his personal forte.

K. Ramanujam was an artist within the Madras Art Movement whose pictorial vision was a translation of his fantasy and oneiric dreams that was radically different in its visual language from the others within the group. He saw reality and the dreams, consciousness and unconsciousness as indissolubly linked. His reality was romantically manifested in the surreal world populated with hybrid and the bizarre creatures. For Ramanujam his artistic sojourn was the result of certain deficiencies setting him apart from normal human beings. His speech was indistinct and his comprehension dismally low. Despite obvious handicaps there was one region within his mind that had the potency to over ride all these limitations and made him rise above. This faculty was his sharp perception of the environment and the people internalized through shortcoming of his speech. Ramanujam's works largely mark a different trajectory from the mainstream of the Madras Art Movement, that which can be read as the polemics within it though unintentional. Here was an artist who was living a life metaphorically through his creations. Ramanujam's unbridled imagination and the power of his visualization were the salient features of his artistic productions.

Alphonso constitutes one of the core members of the group of modern generation of artists within the Madras Art Movement along with A.K. Adimoolam, R.B. Bhaskaran, S.G. Vasudev, C. Dakshinamoorthy, P. Gopinath and S. Nandagopal among many others. The investigation from technique led him to exploring regional/nativist forms particularly from the folk and tribal arts. Since the influence of Indian art and civilization superseded his earlier exploration of new horizons in European modern art he broke away from the Western fold to create paintings distinctly his own. The life of Christ held deep semantics for him believing strongly to be a universal dimension and not particularized to Christianity only. By this interpretation he was setting forth an argument about humanizing values inherent not only in Christianity but as stressed in all religions. Alphonso negotiated his creativity through abstract values of these

emotions. His expressions in art were primarily realized through his figures though he clarified that he was neither realistic nor abstract. Though a regional bias characterize his works Alphonso resisted the proselytization by Paniker to formulate expressions based only on traditional art forms. Alphonso argued that culture is part of our inherited and inherent mental make up and occasioned no valorization of their forms to make them visible. His arbitration with colours bears the same specificity and resemblance to the Indian mural tradition that favoured earth colours as muted browns, olive green, turmeric yellow, Indian red, ultra marine blue and greys and black that was compatible with his austere vision.

R.B. Bhaskaran was also one of the core members of the group of students with Paniker as the head of the institution exhibited aggressiveness in his ideas about what constitutes art. The rebellious mind set of Bhaskaran opposed the indigenist agenda set forth by his teacher Paniker and began formulating concepts that would enable him to move away from restrictions of working within traditionally derived art forms. He was also one of the founding members of the Cholamandal Artist Village but soon parted ways because his creative restlessness would not permit any categorization in artistic conceptualization as 'nativist' or 'regional' and left the village to take up residence in the city and the profession of teaching at the College of Arts and Crafts in 1969.

The enigmatic content – one that was mystical, esoteric and metaphysical – conditioned Bhaskaran's art of late 60s. By early 70s he had his own creative scheme operating. In turning to his social environment to which he was sensitized from a young age when he worked in his uncle's studio creating banners and hoardings for advertisements he could recreate and deflect the realities of life. His maturity and interaction with his teachers and peers at the Art Institution initiated an intellectualization and a debate within him on the crucial question of identity and authenticity. These diverse factors were responsible for his questioning of 'Indianness' on which he did a double take for his arguments and inflected it with stimuli from external sources be it encounters with politics, society or any other cultural factors. The socio-cultural matrix became the mainstay of his art. It is hence not surprising that titles like 'Life Cycle', 'Evolution', 'and Marriage Photos' carried the weight of this argument.

S. G. Vasudev who formed an integral part of the core group on debating the status of modern art in India is an artist whose cerebration on art was not confined to large borrowings or reinventing

the vernacular vocabulary as it was with the majority of the artists within the Madras Group. His close association with theater in the persona of Girish Karnad and with literature through the Kannada poet A.K. Ramanujan and D.R. Bendre effectively amalgamated the influences and inspiration from these varied sources to rework them as visual expressions. The ‘indigenising’ dimension of his art was largely conditioned and drawn from literary sources. Vasudev as a student felt no polarity with the debate centered on the discourse of ‘Indianness’ and authenticity.

Vasudev’s collaborative efforts with the poet A.K. Ramanujan, with the playwright Girish Karnad; working as Art Director for films like *Samskara* and *Vamsa Vriksha*, learning the art of metal relief from a craftsman and using copper as an extension of his canvas, working with wood inlay artists to create contemporary designs all clearly relate to his pedagogy at the institution. In Vasudev’s works the art-craft approach is strongest and reflects on the orientalist, decorative traditional notion of Indian art lauded by revivalists like William Morris and others. And it these elements of patterning, decorating, drawing and mapping continued to be the high points of the Madras Art School’s approach during the tenure of Paniker in late 50s and 60s.

A ubiquitous motif in Vasudev’s oeuvre is the ‘*kalpa vriksha*’ derived from the poetry of Bendre. It remained with him as a dominant continuous symbol, image and metaphor. The light, the shade, the romance and the mystery of the tree struck him and continued with him for a long time. The tree of life and knowledge metamorphosed to tree of death when personal tragedy struck in late 80s. Negotiating through the metaphor of the Tree, Vasudev indulges in celebrating life in its vivacity. It is an abode for the variety of type of life that seeks it for shelter, food and as an arena for playful gamboling especially the monkeys that Vasudev unabashedly employs as a motif for animating his otherwise static compositions. In addition to this his imagery also includes birds and reptiles, fish and fowl, seeds and fruit and men and women. As it is characteristic with his fragmented figuration the tree is identifiable by its dense mass of the trunk, which is decoratively patterned.

C. Douglas and K. Muralidharan are artists who belong to the third generation within the Madras Group. The first generation artists were Paniker, Dhanapal, Krishna Rao, Janakiram, Ram Gopal, Munuswamy, Santhanaraj and others; the second generation were Alphonso, Adimoolam Vasudev, Bhaskaran, Viswanathan, Gopinath, Haridasan among others; while the third generation

making their impact from the portals of this institution internationally are Rm. Palaniappan Douglas and Muralidharan.

Both Douglas and Muralidharan however represent polar opposites with their ideologies and working methods. Both undoubtedly are figurative painters for while Douglas is expressionist with his painted statements and anthropocentric, Muralidharan in the tradition of the Madras Art Movement is a mythical contemporary artist with his imagery grounded in folk art forms and ideas derived from mythical tales. Douglas in his works creates anti heroic imagery trapped in a world that has altered dramatically and reduced life to an unendurable incoherence, which becomes his basic concern.

Both Douglas and Muralidharan's compositions privilege the artistry in conjunction with the theme. For Douglas his support be it paper or canvas perhaps in what could be described as a cathartic process washed and bathed it several times in water and other liquids until it was malleable enough to initiate the process of decoding of his internal energies. His works attend more to this physicality where the support especially the paper he crumbles, cleaves, splits, burns and rifts before commencing his layering with crayons, charcoal sticks or thin layers of transparent water color washes until they become thickly coated. The process is visceral enabling an unselfconscious play of personalized pain and wound. His palette is oppressively dark and somber where perhaps Douglas searches the subconscious in the philosophic milieu of alienation, fragmentation and fragility of existence. This also is explanatory of his artistic statements being untitled in order not to fix his imagery in a particularized context but daringly levitated to be mysterious and ambiguous. Like his hero K.Ramanujam he brings to his work abundant wit in caricatured details.

Muralidharan in his approach to his materials and technique is very contemporary. His long sojourn to Europe opened up possibilities of dexterously employing different types and kinds of industrial or any other materials to enhance the textural values and make an impact on the organization of space wherein he manipulates both positive and negative spaces to create a meaningful dialogue. His textural experimentations has connecting references to his teachers namely Alphonso, Santharaj, Munuswamy. Muralidharan's imagery is rooted and derived from the stockpile of repertoire from Indian mythology that today is his signature style. For Muralidharan this dimension of artistic quest became central because it would enable an

inscribing of his Indian identity indirectly within the regional paradigm with his iconography tethered to in myths and other narratives. By exploring the vast repertoire of his chosen iconography it allowed for an arbitration of forms, images, symbols and metaphors to have a wider space within his art. The naivete and simplicity of form have strength and power as he piles them one over the other to weave a pattern. His large-scale works reflect the Indian mural tradition where the protagonist occupies a hierarchical position, which provides a lead, and the rest of the details become a subtext in his enterprise of painting.

Women Artists within the Madras Art Movement

Women's consciousness sharpened at the turn of the century under the impact of colonial education and nationalist concerns. The earliest evidence of women artists in colonial India is the art exhibition held in Calcutta in 1879, in which twenty-five amateur women artists took part. In the early years of the twentieth century Tagore's niece Sunayani Debi, a housewife, won celebrity status as a naïve artist, while Amrita Sher-Gill was the first professional woman artist in India. In the first decade after Independence few women artists did emerge namely, Shanu Lahiri, Kamala Roy Chowdhary, Kamala Das Gupta and Amina Ahmad, who were seeking to establish their professional credentials. In the Nehruvian era, it is argued, women groped for individual expressions within the dominant artistic framework, caught in the dialectic between the representation of women in art and their self-representation as women.

The women artists have played a marginal role within the Madras Art Movement. Nevertheless what emerges and becomes relevant in this context is that in a conservative and male dominated patriarchal set up these women artists were able to mark important signposts created by their individuation through intense struggle. The most prominent who were able to establish themselves with their individual styles are Arnawaz Vasudev nee Driver, [1945-1988] T.K. Padmini, [1943-1982] Rani Pooviah nee Nanjappa and Anila Thomas nee Jacob, [1941 -] the first three were painters and the last mentioned is a sculptor. Unfortunately all three painters today are no more having died at a comparative young age. They were truly progressive and determined to make a mark for themselves in this arena particularly in the late 60s and early 70s. It becomes mandatory to mention them to underline the male dominated art scene that constituted art practice. Whether their visibility within the discourse of the Madras Art Movement marks it as feminist intervention in the 70s or subsumed within the Indian modernism is a point of contention, which exceeds the scope of this thesis.

