

The Contemporary Indian Artists: Special Reference to the Mythological Bodies as a Grotesque

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Abstract

The paper delineates the present scenario of Indian artists, which has released its extreme values of the *Grotesque* in their works, and described the meaning of the Grotesque and its description of various elements, which pour out of intermingle bodies of different species and other things, and mythological Gods and Goddesses as a representation of the grotesque in the works of Indian sculptures and paintings. One can feel the profundity of the grotesqueness of *Kali*, *Durga*, *Ganesha*, *Narsimha*, *Mahesha*, and others. Today, there is a new concept of the grotesque, which is being widely shared by intermingle bodies of Gods and Goddesses, and this influence among the Indian art. The represented in this art by many, from this century are *Raja Ravi Verma*, *Jamini Ray*, *Nandlal Bose*, *M. F. Husain*, *F. N. Souza*, *Tayeb Mehta*, *A. Bhupen Khaker*, *Manjit Bawa*. The artists of contemporary genre are *Bharti Kher*, *Mithu Sen*, *Jaya Shri Burma*, *Gogi Saroj Pal* and others. So, the Indian contemporary artists have signified their subjectivity in their unique ways and also tried to elucidate the nature of uniqueness.

Keynotes- Grotesque, Intermingle Bodies, Mythological Gods and Goddesses, Indian Art and Indian Artists

Paper

India is rich in myths, but the two most powerful mythologies '*Ramayana*' and '*Mahabharata*' are well known, in this we found so many epics that enclosed it with many varieties of grotesque that is related to the different gods and goddesses, devils and demons, these are called super beings. These mythological super beings are more than three hundred thirty millions and all are different from each other and have different appearance in which all they depicting in intermingling bodies of different species, multi-arms, more than one head and many legs, which are portrayed by an ambiance of exaltation, unreality, exaggeration of man and woman characteristics and even grotesque. With the inspiration of the super beings, the artists have worked on these topics from ancient time to the present, but the artists from the last century have painted these super beings in dramatically on their ways by using different elements of the grotesque, which represent sometimes strange, unique, fantastic and extravagant and sometimes represent a terrific, horrific, heterogeneous, bizarre, erotic, metamorphic, zoomorphic, unnatural, monstrous and abnormal. The grotesque is a sixteenth century Roman term, used in Nero's Domus Aurea for the first time, in this palace the fantastical floral pattern amalgamated with different species. But its meaning is widely known in twenty first century by the different conceptions; it can be an expression of ambiguity between reality and unreality, beauty and the sublime, rational and irrational, truth and false etc. According to Swami Vivekananda, true art can be compared to a lily which springs from the ground takes its nourishment from the ground is in touch with the ground and yet is quite high above it. So art must be touched with nature and wherever that touched is gone, the art degenerates and grotesque caricature, the Indian tendency to represent the ideals become degraded into painting or temple sculpture as a grotesque one.ⁱ

These grotesque imaginations are used by many Indian contemporary artists in the form of intermingle with two or more species together like wings with horse, elephant, bird and human, human face with snake, fish, bird and animal bodies, human bodies with bird, and animal faces, sometimes used a human body with many heads, arms, legs, eyes, and hands. The gods and goddesses like *Durga* has depicted in color of reddish yellow with multi-arms appeared in a terrifying grotesque, *Saraswati* is seen in white representing with four arms seated with lotus, *Ganesha* is shown in pink portraying with elephant headed human body, *Kali* is in black portraying with ten arms, *Krishna* is blue colored body, *Ravana* in black sometimes appeared with many hands, sometimes with many heads, often many eyes, and rarely many legs. Hanuman representing in a human body with a monkey face, *Mahesha* is a lion face human body; *Vishnu* god has incarnated himself into nine avatars. The imaginations of myths are used by many modern Indian artists i.e. *Raja Ravi Verma*, *Jamini Ray*, *Nandlal Bose*, *Badri Narayan*, *M. F. Husain*, *F. N. Souza*, *Tayeb Mehta*, *K. G. Subramanyan*, *A. Ramachandra*, *Gogi Saroj Pal*, *Jai Zharotia*, *Bikash Bhattachariya* and many more have their innumerable works.

Raja Ravi Verma, who was a maverick painter of his time, he was first who captured the beauty of nude women characterized in the Puranas and other Hindu scripture.ⁱⁱ He made thousands of copies of oleographic paintings, including *Ahimahi Vadh*, *AshtaSiddhi*, *Durga*, *Mahishasura-mardini*; the slayer of the buffalo demon, *Maruti*, *Murugan*, *Jatayu Vadh*, and many more.

Nala Damayanti, Hamsa Samvad, Shakuntala, and Shri Rama Vanquishing the Sea, and many intermingle bodies have captured a remarkable turn from his style because of mass production his works called as calendar art. He had well managed structures between the sacred and the erotically depiction,ⁱⁱⁱ and continuously a heterogeneous space between common people and other artists, because most of the people worshiped his paintings as gods and goddesses who took from Indian mythology but some are not accepted in a new iconic visuality, (see in Fig-1) it represented a sensation of awe.^{iv}

Nandalal Bose has excited in such activities like decorating pandals, puja, or structure of taja was form of community work his sophisticated interest in modeling images of Buddhist and Hindu mythological gods, (see in Fig-2). Mythological gods of amalgamated bodies of two or more species including: Durga, Ganesha, Elephants and Bulls were often produced and could be seen in fairs and festivals, even through his daily routine was gone to village, school and he would faces potters, carpenters and toy makers, working at their crafts, his intimate understanding of each material and its characters and these craft skill has manipulated into simple instruments or simple materials like chisel it was delighted to him.

Jamini Roy was different from others; he has a unique identity and strange element in his artwork. By the use of contour lines juxtaposition between concave and convex, the artist has enhanced the expression of his thought. Jamini Roy has emphasized to maintain the sensuousness of elements with the pictorial presentation in his works. The simplicity existed in his painting that originated from his own personality. With the inspiration of patua of kalighat he was known the “Father of the folk, renaissance” in modern Indian identity.^v He used protruding eyes, unnatural blends figures with flat colors (he used seven basic colors made from organic materials, including rock dust, mercury, lamp black, tamarind seeds, powder and others). His floromorphic lines create a rhythmic pattern, (see in Fig-3) his theme, mostly on Ramayana like: Krishna Balarama and Subhadra, Krishnaleela, Gosthaleela, Kamadhenu, and others are Resurrection of Christ, Cats, Fish, lobster, The Last Supper and Crucifixion etc. all have the great examples.

Let's the look of *Badri Narayan's* art is seems quite simple, it is actually rich with symbolism and significance. Horses with wings, magicians, fairies, multi-tusked elephants and unicorns are just some of the magical characters that inhabit his paintings in the current exhibition. The artist usually takes inspiration for his characters from Indian culture, religion and mythology. As such, the figures of Buddha and Ganesha also frequent his work.^{vi}

Though *M. F. Husain's* paintings and color palette reflect strong influences of Austrian Expressionists like Egon Schiele and Gustav Klimt are celebrating the grotesque with a severe intensity of line and the shocking distortion of form, it seldom offers the brooding haunt that lingers. *M. F. Husain* was one of the controversial artists. His works can be called grotesque and metaphorical. His ideas dwelling on the Indian mythological super beings, including; Bharat Mata, Hanuman, Saraswati, Ganesha and others, which are composed often distorts and subtracts in style,(see in Fig-4) His works divulged the deft and vigorous strokes, in of his painting the Saraswati, representing goddess is a woman as a muse. The lack of serious substance behind the Husain's work is also perplexed curators seeking an exploration beneath and beyond the cursory, which has little to do with the artist's own motivations for his creative depictions and visual vocabulary.

One of the foremost Indian artists *K. G. Subramanyan*, who have depicted winged horses excellently along with other characters from ancient myths and traditional stories, we can see in one of his series paintings entitled with '*Inayat Khan Looks at Oxford*' the flying horses are depicted metaphorical presentation of the past, in this an old man who is close to his death watching these animals. Another painting '*Figure Group and Flying horse*', (see in Fig-5) these unique creatures can be seen flying and wandering along with women figures.

The used of the grotesque image in the representation of headless human body and self portraits connoted with the animals or birds, known by the name A. Ramachandran. His discoveries are a quirky sense of irony suffused with the socio-political imagery. His earlier paintings are grotesque imagery presenting the theme on turmoil, dehumanized, exploitation, oppression, war and brutalized figures because of the impact of partition of India and Pakistan, and post partitions of Bengal gradually it felt on his canvases.

Tayeb Mehta, used Indian mythological form in a unique style, his images are diagonally tied up on canvases. The frame of destructive force depicting in the Tayeb Mehta's painting entitled *Kali, Mahishasuramardini* and *Mahishasura*, all these works bring into the divine triumphing over the evil, all-consuming, cosmic force represented by a fearsome grotesque *human female face*—the face of The Terrible Mother. In his *Mahishasura* (see in Fig-6), images of the goddess Kali locked in battle with the buffalo demon, Tayeb Mehta was to continue with his brooding forms which were as much harbingers of destruction as well as of its detoxification. In focusing on the buffalo demon *Mahishasura*, he also depicted an interlocking of the masculine and feminine, the divine and the mortal, the bestial and the human in perpetual coexistence.

Look at F.N. Souza, who poured out his rage against the Roman Catholic machine through his mesmerizing and yet grotesque depictions of Christ. He hadn't painted as much as savaged the canvases and the contrasting compassion in his nudes is striking. Francis Newton Souza is best known for his inhuman heads with eyes placed over the forehead and gnashing teeth made by slashing, stabbing strokes. Many of his flayed Christ figures (see in Fig-7), emerged from his childhood experience of a rigid, hypocritical Roman Catholic Church and society in his birthplace, Goa.

One unique Indian artist of this era, Bhupen Khakar celebrated homosexuality long before it was in vogue to do so. Paintings such as *Two Men in Banaras* (1982) would still be considered bold in the way Khakar brought the sacred and the profane together. Manjit Bawa is the first in his oeuvre to consider the human form, also love to paint the Krishna in a playful human and divine way. He creates Krishna in various dualities, bold juxtaposition and soft modeled human figures almost come to defy anatomical structure. We can see in one of his paintings the Lord Krishna, presented in a bluish purple with an enormous size of multiple headed snake.

Today's grotesque are visualized in the works of Bharti Kher's great fully, her works incorporate beauty and the beast. She is popular by her heterogeneous conceptual ideas maligned with the Indian mythology^{vii}, relationship with the man and animals, representing the hybrids and transformation, see in the example with the titled: Hybrid Series, it is a series of six photographs anamorphic creatures in which woman depicting with animal face, or an animal body. In one of his hybrid series, entitled with 'And All the While the Benevolent Slept' a woman look like a worrier goddess Chinnamaste, other series entitled with 'Angel', 'Family Portrait', 'Chocolate Muffin', 'Feather Duster', 'The Hunter and the Prophet', in Angel she carrying a blue baby in her hand, in Family Portrait she standing with the animal face baby boy, in Chocolate Muffin (see in Fig-8), she appeared in a weird and fearful face hold muffins in her hands, and other are in lion face body, all are appearing bizarrely seductive and demure in their tranquil poses.

Humorous and ironical identity known by the work of Mithu Sen, she is widely used in a body of human, nonhuman inanimate with the beautiful grotesque and disarmingly attractive. Grotesque is her medium to convey her message or reason of a cause. She works on gigantic sculptures and provocative in contemporary Indian art. As a woman she explores sexuality, female body parts which are represented highly erotic. She creates a feeling of repulsiveness and vomits like through the use of hair, teeth, bones, blood even her own self, viewer's react as her work is offensive.

The fantasy of the Jayasri Burman's work have been seen in the hybridized images of woman looked in a bird body. Gogi Saroj Pal also do the same, she is inspired by the birds and composed herself into a beautiful and erotical figure of bird. Others artist whose works are on mythology bodies even create a feeling of strange or the images of the grotesque in the work of Shine Shivan, he used so many nauseate thing in his work like meat of a dead animal, skull, features, poisons, dunk, bones, teeth, blood, and other bad smile things, he is first who invent the technique of "rossetta" it made with the snake poison and cactus thorn.^{viii}

Conclusion

Not in India, every artists of the world have want his and her work will be appreciated more and more, they all want to create new, unique and strange work by using different ideas, concepts and thought, this uniqueness inspired with the different mythology, or the thought of social concepts, or political ideas, whether they used of various mediums or techniques or not, they create more and more grotesque.



Fig-1, Raja Ravi Varma, Durga, oil on canvas, Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Source: <http://www.cyberkerala.com/rajaravivarma/ravivarma-painting-61.htm>



Fig-2, Nandlal Bose, Garuda, Book illustration from, Myths of Hindus and Buddhists, by Anand Kumar Swamy, Source: <http://dolorosa-reveries.blogspot.com/search/label/1900%27s>



Fig-3, Jamini Roy, Cat with Bird, tempera on Paper, 17 x 24.5 in, Source: <http://www.aicongallery.com/artists/jamini-roy/featured-works?view=slider#2>



Fig-4, M. F. Husain, Hanuman with Multi Headed Ravana, Source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/lifestyle/what-s-hot/story/m-f-husain-legendary-indian-artist-painter-and-his-controversial-works-nude-indian-gods-and-goddesses-263359-2015-09-17>



Fig-5, K. G. Subramanyan, Figure group and Flying Horse, acrylic on paper, 29 x 21 in, Source: <http://www.artnet.com/artists/kg-subramanyan/figure-group-and-flying-horse-gu6ZVeUBi4dIXAQPLBFj1g2>



Fig-6, Tayeb Mehta, Mahishasura, acrylic on canvas, 59 x 47¼ in. Source: <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/tyeb-mehta-b-1925-mahishasura-4960143-details.aspx>

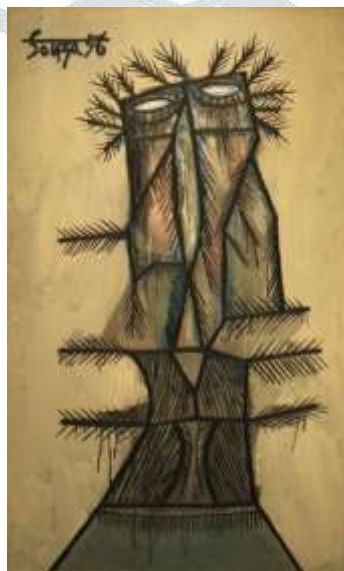


Fig- 7, F. N. Souza, Christ on Palm Sunday, oil on board, 48 x 30 inches, Source: <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/francis-newton-souza-christ-on-palm-sunday>



Fig-8, Bharti Kher, Chocolate Muffin: Hybrid Series, digital c-print, 45 x 29 inches, Source: <http://www.artnet.com/artists/bharti-kher/chocolate-muffin-from-the-hybrid-series-KcZ29Y53yIgULUeTDnN5VA2>

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