

NEO -TANTRIC ART IN INDIA: VISUAL INTERPRETATION OF BIREN DE'S METAPHYSICAL INTROSPECTION THROUGH SYMBOLS

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ABSTRACT

The paper is based on a critical analysis of neo-tantric art in India existing in the visual arts practices of the regions in India. The history of Indian visual arts has a prosperous existence in tantric forms. Tantra found its artistic impressions with the various symbols like the lingam and yoni in sculptures and scrolls of ancient India. According to Tantra, the individual being and collective, universal being are the same and one. Thus the visual language all that exists in the universe must also exist in the individual body.

The paper also focuses on the contemporary art practices of Neo-Tantric art by Indian artists. The study gives a clear understanding and vision into the precise depiction through the evaluation of case studies. The study aims to develop a framework through focusing the Biren De's art practice where a metaphysical introspection through symbols has been conceptualised.

Keywords: Neo-Tantric Art, India, Visual Interpretation, Tantric forms, symbols, Biren De.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Indian Visual Arts did not develop until the 1940s when India extended independence from the British era. During the forties and fifties, Indian artists sought to reclaim their identity by painting in a more traditional style of painting what was in their environment. Painters in the neo-tantric tradition - working from different parts of India and, in some instances, different regions of the globe tried to establish their work more in a symbolic manner (Mookerjee, 1966).

In the 1960s some Indian artists activated experimenting with an abstract art veined on the Visual Art forms of confident Buddhist and Hindu cults practising a form of meditation known and termed as Tantra. Tantra comprises the worship of the dual male-female principle embodied in the physical union of Goddess Kali and her consort Shiva. This sexual union echoes there, and by extension, human origin in an invisible oneness. The human tantric strives for this primaeval unity through undisclosed sexual rituals which encompass the observation of religious images, sexual objects like the lingam, and sacred geometricized diagrams are identified as yantras. The Visual Arts form based on Tantra is found in many countries in Asia (Mookerjee, 1966).

The Neo-Tantra art movement got its initial impetus in 1965 with an exhibition of paintings by Biren De which appeared to take off on Tantra art. Other artists soon followed, including Ghulam Rasool Santosh, K C S Paniker, Jagdish Swaminathan, Sankar Palsikar, Harisadan, Om Prakash and Prafulla Mohanty. For these artists' explorations, the religious art form seemed likely to develop their form of abstract painting into a genuinely Indian Art idiom. The artists were also embraced by Tantra art's inherent qualities, which seemed ready-made for uses which could compare with contemporary

abstract art elsewhere. Santosh's compositions, with their cubist nuances, seemed to relate the artistic practices of the past with very contemporary forms of expression.

Through the artists' art practices though most paintings in this genre offer religious resonances at first glance, most Neo-Tantric artists insist that they explore its artistic possibilities more than the transcendent emphasis of Tantra art (Rawson, 1973). Swaminathan, through his art practice, is evident that the plastic-visual possibilities of tantric art were more important Tantric philosophy (Swaminathan, 1974). Counterpoint is provided, however, by Santosh who observed in his work an attempt to express 'the colourless through colour, the formless through form.'

2. BIREN DE'S ART PRACTICE: A METAPHYSICAL INTROSPECTION THROUGH SYMBOLS

In the explorations of Biren De's art practice, from 1956 onward, his figurative compositions in Visual Art practices activated to fragment, turning into free silhouettes and components. Around this period De, along with some of his contemporary visual artists, drew away from the styles of their forerunners artists; influence their distinguished group to initiate an individual vantage based on their inner artistic experiences. De's imagery began inducing a spiritual introspection through recurrent symbols of the lotus, the sun, the wheel and bursting seeds. The artist's paintings emphasised the disintegration of energy barren of any restless movement; only a dazzling effulgence at its heart. The physical unification of man and woman was abstracted into symbols: a 'u'-like form expressing the female value and the straight and wedge-like shape representing the male (De, 1985).

Biren De was born in 1926, dated on 8th October. He obtained his art learnings as a diploma in Fine Art from the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Calcutta (now Kolkata), in 1949. Afterwards, from 1952-63 he was taught as a faculty at the College of Art in New Delhi. In 1959, De was awarded a Fulbright Grant, and he spent the following year living and working in New York. He had exhibited extensively, representing India at the Venice Biennial in 1962 and the Salon de Mai, Paris in 1951. Instances of his artworks are in the NGMA of New Delhi, the Berlin State Museum, the National Gallery, Prague, and away. Biren De left the world on 12th March 2011 in Delhi (Malik, 2006).

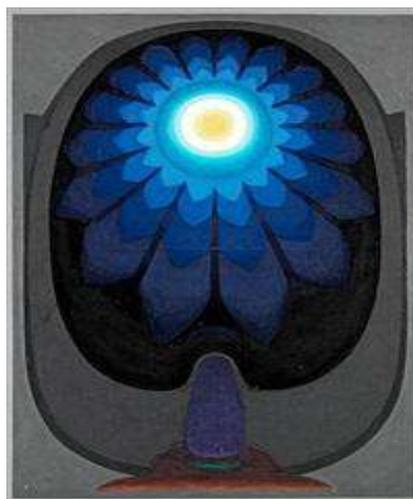


Plate 1: Biren De, August '88, 46.1 x 31.9 inches

Image Courtesy: <https://www.invaluable.com/artist/de-biren-z69hg58dzd/sold-at-auction-prices/>

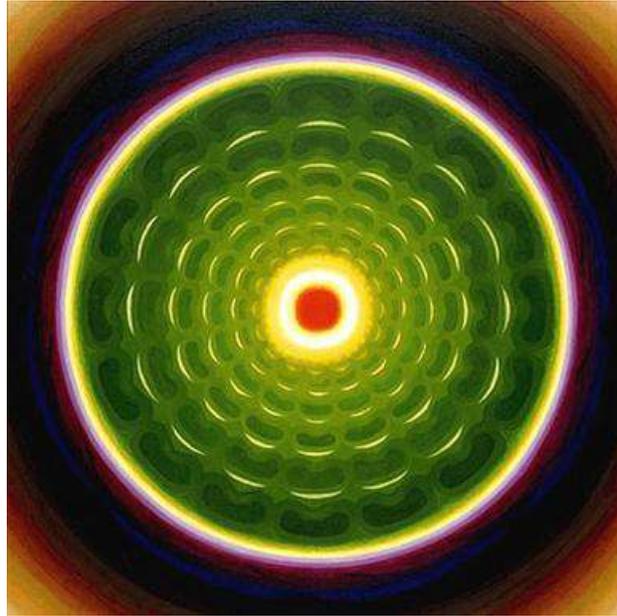


Plate 2 : Biren De, Untitled, 1990, Oil on canvas, 40 x 40 inches

Image Courtesy: <https://arteryindia.com/artist/databank/artwork/Biren-De/untitled/22710>

The artist equivocated between deep blues and blazing reds, his final aim being the awakening of the psyche towards a collective consciousness. Averse to the 'hard edge' abstraction of the West, De's fluid and suggestive geometry were about dispersion, diffusion and dematerialisation (Malik, 2006).

3. CONCLUSION

The subject of neo-tantra art has observed a dramatic upsurge in the recent history of cultural discourse, inviting scholars from across the different parts of the globe to explore their meditative and visual manifestations in the understanding of the self and the world. In recent years, for its timeless and universal appeal, the study of neo-tantric forms, symbols has seen a significant development across the globe. Unlike various other religious-philosophical doctrines and ritual traditions, the tantric approach to life does not call for renunciation, detachment and asceticism to attain self-realisation. The neo-tantric way is not of the withdrawal from life, but, the fullest possible acceptance of our desires, feelings and situations as human beings.

The study established that the visual interpretation of neo-tantric images in Indian Art dimensioned an individual's visual interpretation in a new way to find the value of Indian Art in context to the neo-tantric perception. It subsequently impacts on the utilization of the knowledge and exploration of forms and symbols of tantric images in crossing the terrain regions of India. Biren De's works identified a new high towards the development of neo-tantric art through the artist's representations of symbols which has the visual interactions of metaphysical introspection.

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