Painted surfaces do strange things to those who look at them. They excite, they please, and sometimes, like slick over the ocean, fail to penetrate the porosity of one's being. Each reaction is individual and different, depending on what alters and conditions one's sensibilities. Our responses can be detached from any previous knowledge of the artist — just an inter-action between the painting and the observer. On the other hand, our responses can be embellished by trends and movements surrounding the artist.

In their visual appeal and their technical skill, Raza's paintings reach out to you, adding dimensions as one gets acquainted with the dark, brooding forest that accompanied his childhood, the implacable night that come to him daily, nature and its tangible elements

*Bindu, 1981*
*Acrylic on canvas, 100x100 cms*
*Collection: Mr and Mrs Pierre Repellin, Grenoble*

which abounded around him. Later horizons and trends would further alter Raza as he physically moved from India to France from geometrical to abstract landscape, to abstract art.

For a long time now, there has been no visual representation of what the title of a painting suggests. It can be argued that such an ability is not special. But what is special is the extraordinary way Raza uses colour, line, texture and space, through abstractions, to evoke the visual description and the emotive quality of a painting. *Summer* (1964) is an exuberant canvas of dominating shades of yellow going into deep orange, merging into green, blending into blue. It is an example of Raza's colour orchestration, the tonality, the musical range of a raga. This system of colour gradation is an important part of his paintings. Recent paintings like *Encounter 85,* show it in their geometrical colour alterations.

Drain colour from a Raza painting and it is as meaningless as a body without its life force, rigor mortis. Yellow, white, red and blue appear on Raza's canvasses in masterly abstractions. Juxtaposing each other, their brilliance acquires a certain kinetic energy, as it were. They don't always have to wait for black to be their catalyst. Black is the colour which dominates them, however, plays with them in a game of contrast and continuity. "The mother colour is black", and every other colour emanates from that.

Black, Krishna, is a colour which fascinates Raza. It had played an important part in his childhood: darkness, the absence of light, the deep forests of Madhya Pradesh, brought to him a personalised interpretation of light and shade and their implications.

According to Raza, black leads to colour: and as we know the sun leads to light, which gives us colour. His early paintings with geometric forms are often represented with the black sun. Now the *Black Sun* (1953), is an example of this.

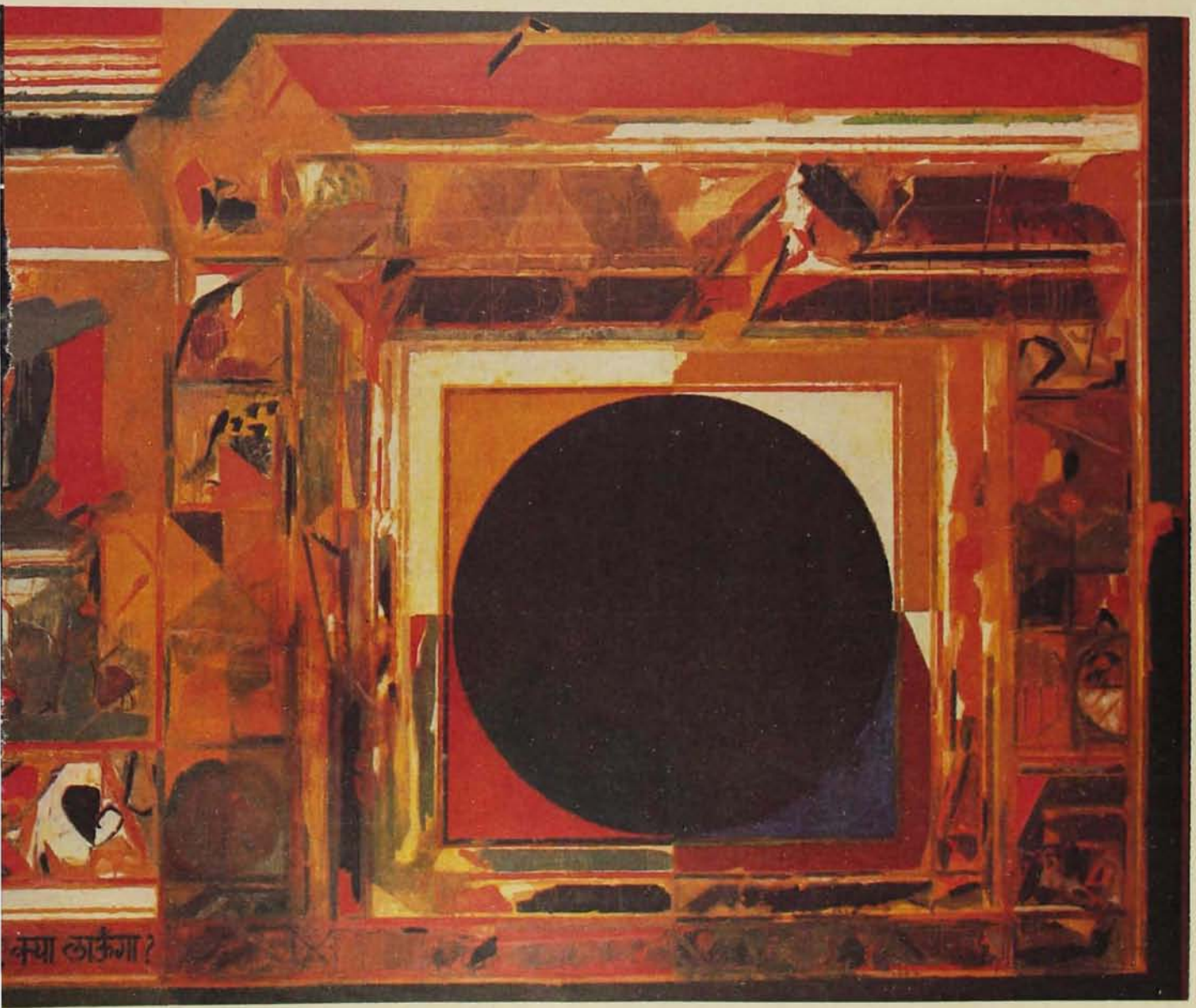
Raza's sun travels a lot in his paintings. It reflects on the brilliance of an European *Summer* (1964) on the shades and shadows of *Oasis,* (1975) or the vivacity of *Rajasthan* (1973). It descends from the sky and alters itself into *Bindu* (1978), which is a central form in other units of abstract colour. It enlarges itself into a later *Bindu* of 1981, which dominates both colour and space in the painting. In *Ma* (1981), while Raza comes to "terms with colour and colour images", the black *Bindu* provides a counter-point. While the line in Hindi forms the opening thought of a poem by Ashok Vajpayee, for Raza it serves a quest into self analysis.

Opposite page, left:
*Encounter, 85, 1984*
*Acrylic on paper, 100x100 cms*
*Collection: Mrs Saryu Doshi, Bombay*

Right: *Kendra, 1981*

Left: *Black Sun, 1953*
*Gouache on paper, 45x47 cms*
*Collection: Mrs Jacques Lassaigne, Paris*

*Ma, 1981*
*Acrylic on canvas, 175x260 cms*
*Collection: Mr Bal Chhabda and Mr M. F. Hussain, Bombay*



*The White Flower, 1983*
*Acrylic on canvas, 80x80 cms*
*Collection: Mr and Mrs Devinder Singh Sahney, Bombay*

For Raza, the *Bindu* is a symbol of peace since it was conceived out of the silence of total concentration. From a cerebral beginning, a thought which is continuously being churned in the mind gradually becomes emotional while it is being assimilated into the body. Once it becomes part of the body system, it bursts forth spontaneously, from silence to a visual declaration, from *Bindu* to a white flower: a potential finding completion. This is almost parallel in nature to the way one learns meditation, the Buddhist way, slow, repeated gestures which one has to concentrate on, give way to an easy rhythm, which become part of the system and lead to a joyful internalising. All effort ceases.

If we were to rob Raza's *Bindu* of its concept, it would not decrease in value. So strong is its visual appeal, that purely on its aesthetic quality it would continue to exist.

No one creates in isolation. Whether it is an environment, a situation, or another human being, influences are necessary. To not be able to mutate an already existing form, to not

Opposite page:

Above left: *Summber, 1964*
*Oil on canvas, 190x190 cms*
*Collection: Museum of Modern Art, Paris*

Above right: *Oasis, 1975*
*Acrylic on canvas, 100x100 cms*
*Collection: Mr and Mrs Rene Floch, Paris*

Below left: *Rajasthan, 1973*
*Acrylic on canvas, 120x120 cms*
*Collection: Mr and Mrs Roger Caillat, Serves*

Below right: *Bindu, 1978*
*Acrylic on canvas, 152x152 cms*
*Collection: Roopankar, Museum of Fine Arts, Bhopal*

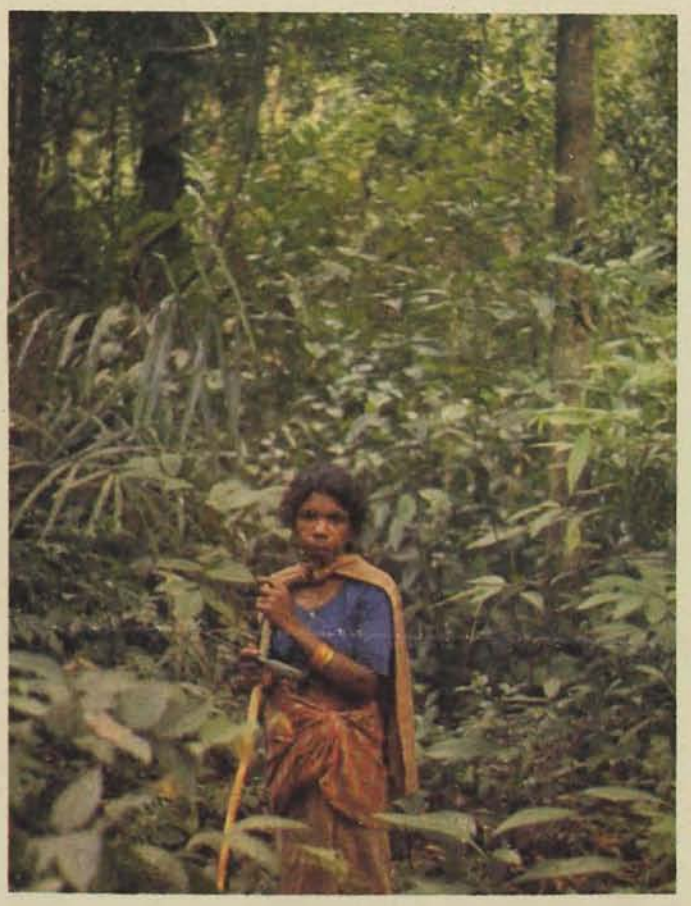
succeed in assimilating an influence, to be incapable of transforming, speaks of the very ordinary. But, to either be able to discard, or go beyond the guide and the *guru*, that is what makes an artist noteworthy.

Raza is fascinated by the *guru sishya* tradition and speculates whether *sishyas* leave their *gurus* behind. He feels that at a certain stage it is necessary to discard all influences and come to oneself as the ultimate source of creation.

A whole chain of influences have brought Raza where he is today. His childhood forest Mandala took him to the Progressive Movement of the fifties in Bombay. Indian art, this movement felt, had atrophied due to the sentimentality of the Bengal School. Wishing to seek a new expression, artists of this movement sought experiences and stimulii in Europe. Paris of the fifties was discovered by Raza, as were Klee and Kandinsky. But, just as in high tide each wave goes further than the preceding one, today Raza is striding forward, leaving them all behind

# *The hunting people*

## Kadars, forest tribals of south India



Left: *A Kadar woman in the forest with her stick and billhook; wild yams and other produce will be placed in the cloth tied around her waist. She, and others of her generation, have many stories to tell of the old times, as they are the last to know life in the forest as it had been in the past*

With none of the exotic trappings, such as poison darts, vivid personal adornments or unusual artefacts popularly associated with forest dwelling tribal peoples, the Kadar of southwest India pursue a quietly unspectacular lifestyle as semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers. Scattered in several groups through the tropical moist forests of the Anaimalai Hills (a southern portion of the Western Ghats range), and now comprising only a few hundred individuals, these hill people are one of India's many 'Scheduled Tribes' nominally recognised by the Constitution as having special needs in regard to welfare and social advancement.

Early anthropologists regarded the Kadar as related to the Veddas, forest bowmen of Sri Lanka, now effectively extinct, and to Australian aboriginals. Whilst less confident about pronouncing on man's racial subdivisions, many modern workers would still support the hypothesis