

The essence of past days
And where they start,
Foundations, roots,
The very heart.

Always catching the thread
of actions, histories,
To live, to think, to feel, to love
To make discoveries.

For many years now, Raza has been painting what could be termed a series of variations on some themes he seem to hold dear to his heart and aesthetic vision. He does not repeat either the themes or himself – but he returns to them again and again. Each time the return is inscribed with something subtly new which a discerning eye would never miss. It is like recovering from the known and already excavated territory a remnant, one had not noticed before. In the visible to approximate the invisible. The artistic effort truly lies for Raza in bringing to the arena of the visible that which has remained so far invisible. The human endeavour forever gets enriched by such an artistic act. In the human finally the visible and the invisible merge – neither of them claiming to be complete by itself. Meaning can manifest itself only in visible form : the formal is, therefore, crucial to meaningful. Meaning for Raza cannot exist without form. In form inheres meaning.

The finite space of the painted canvass uncurtains the immense infinitude that lies beyond conscious awareness. The viability of the painted space reflects the hidden energy, a force which Raza all too often describes as 'mysterious', which cannot be manipulated but comes as an unsolicited gift. Art, then, consecrates reality : it is a divine gift to the world humanly discovered and revealed.

The connectivity with the infinite, with the hidden and the larger provides Raza's art with a dimension which can only be called spiritual. However, it has no so called religious or ritualist connotations. Yet this is an art which is executed as prayer : asking for grace, for blessings and affirming the value and

meaning of human faith. It is prayer couched in plentitude and complexity but it seeks no divine favour save holding together, a commonly shared destiny of liberation and affirmation, a dispensation which allows access to the mystery and wonder of life and the world. It is prayer which seeks 'dynamic equilibrium as expressive of the true nature of reality' as Mondrian would have had. It is art not replicating reality : it is art revealing to reality itself its own buried layers, its unintimated absences, its deep wonders, its enriching mysteries. Raza's art raises the material world to the level of a cosmos, in which the earthly is elevated to be one with the etherly.

Raza's art also invariably revels a certain grandeur and immensity. Grandeur of colours and geometrical shapes; grandeur of the provoked meanings which are often sublime; then grandeur of the painted surface which skillfully orchestrates passion, fury and stillness, colours seem, in a Raza work, each one assigned its proper location on the canvass and yet reaching out to others in consonance and thereby creating an immensity of interactive colours and shapes, in dialogue with each other, almost in a neighbourly chatter.

In our age there has been a persistent demand from art that it should respond to its times. The response is historicized; its aspects are interpreted to reflect, question or affirm the historical times. Yet, we know that art is also one of the few means at the disposal of human creativity and imagination by which they supercede or suspend time, liberate themselves from the confines and constraints of the linear, the chronometrial. Instead of serving time, art may choose to address eternity. Man, in any case, in all times has been caught between time and eternity. Raza's art has not been overtly concerned with socio-political times. And yet it has tried to explore, while evolving its unique painterly language and its own distinct idiom, what is essential in life, nature and destiny. While historical developments and circumstances have certainly influenced his life and work, Raza has chosen not to allow his art reflect them directly. This is the art addressed to eternity, discovering and fashioning a space where time is suspended, almost buried behind layers of colours. His works have dates on which they were created and yet they are not period pieces. They survive in their vibrance, sheer passionate intensity and imaginative intimation because they celebrate man beyond time,

life across history, human existence in an integrity above mortality. In a poem written for Raza's eightieth birthday I felt 'Time is a rag on which your hands have / wiped off colours'.

In the final analysis, Raza's art creates a luminous and illuminating ambience in which it stands sublime, fulfilled and reassuring. It assures us yet again that art is the most enduring and life-enhancing affirmation of our remaining human, nobly and courageously, in difficult and murderous times.