

ETHEREAL COLOURS

Eight artists and the exploration of the sensuous and the spiritual

■ by Yashodhara DALMIA



SEVEN
BY ASHOK VAJPEYI
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A SOLITARY QUEST: LIFE AND ART OF SUHAS ROY
BY SANKAR MAJUMDAR
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diverse means in their work but if there is a common thread it is the prismatic reflection of the cross-currents of abstraction from both countries. In the three other painters—Akhilesh, Seema Ghurayya and Manish Pushkale—based in Bhopal and Delhi, but also migrants from other areas in India, there is a refraction of cultures and traditions.

Over the years, Raza's evocative geometric forms have juxtaposed glittering, hard-edged shapes with dark centres titled *Bindu*. The Bindu has, so to speak, provided the void or the spiritual energy that he experienced in childhood when his teacher in a small village in Madhya Pradesh taught him to concentrate by focusing on the centre. It has for many years informed his work where there has been a play of light and colour and movement and stillness in a manner that evokes both transcendent as well as material realities.

Viswanadhan, a founder member of the Chalamandal Artists' Village and student of K.C.S. Paniker, has created pris-

FROM THE CORNERS OF HISTORY abstract art emerges whenever there is a need for the renewal of spirit. Its limitlessness and transcendence allow for a reflective mode and lead to a means of coping with the ravages of war and man's inhumanity towards man. If art at the turn of the last century turned abstract with Kandinsky's almost spiritual gestures, it was to acquire purity and silence and alter negation of human effort. For Indian artists based in Paris from the 1940s onwards, non-representative art has also meant a conflation with ancient yantrik forms which were symbolic of cosmic energies and had immanent powers of restoration.

In *Seven*, written by poet and writer Ashok Vajpeyi, we are provided with a selection of seven artists, four of whom have lived and worked in Paris. Thus the veteran artist S.H. Raza, Viswana-

dhan, Rajendra Dhawan and Sujata

Bajaj employ

matic triangles that seem to transmit light while suggesting great movement. His initial yantrik diagrams in deep earthy colours move on to light, buoyant triangles that are almost air-borne. The play of slabs of radiant yellows, reds and greens on the surface is highlighted by crevices of white shafts of light. A brilliant colourist, Viswanadhan has sought forms that seem to be in perpetual movement on the canvas. His films of fire, ether and water are rooted in the five sensuous energies that unite the differences of caste and colours, dissolving divisive fragmentations.

In her vivid colours interspersed with Hindi and Sanskrit script, Bajaj finds connectivity with the villages of Rajasthan and other parts of India which nurtured her sensibility. Primarily she attempts to energise her painterly evocations of space and form. The most reticent of the group and also the most unstructured is Paris-based Dhawan. His broad swathes of brown, burgundy and mustard create overlapping waves caught in a vortex of swirling forms which are open-ended. They are like wild shrubbery suggesting limitless expanses which can be hewn but not tamed.

Almost as a counter-point are the gridded colour harmonies of Bhopal-based Akhilesh. The transposed symmetry of colours is contained by uneven contours which seem to stretch beyond the canvas. The subtle transformations in Ghurayya's works are like a palimpsest of memories that seek sublimation while Pushkale's shifting tones and

emergent shapes echo a sense of displacement and a resulting expansion as a way of being.

The text written by Vajpeyi in a poetic vein eschews art historical readings and spans a wide expanse from poetry to literature. In many ways, it is a refreshing change from the density of art writings and indeed sensitises one to the subtle innuendoes of paint. The book, dedicated to the memory of Andre Malraux, is a visual treat with many samplers of the work of each artist.

The paintings of the intensely representative Kolkata artist Suhas Roy act as a counter-point to the emphasis on abstraction in the earlier volume. His winsome women are displayed in their ample sensuousness even as they meet the male gaze with a suitable coyness. From landscapes to nudes, the tactile surfaces of these paintings are reproduced in their full lustre and colour in the book. The text by Sankar Majumdar is appropriately art historical as it traces Roy's works from its earliest development. The unabashed lustrousness of the works seems to balance all the spiritual aspirations, produced equally abundantly, in the earlier book. ■



Roy's *Radha*, an acrylic on canvas