

RAZI, GORRIO, 06920 FRANCE.
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In October 1950, at the age of 28, I came to France in search of light. It happened in the purest Indian tradition, with the only difference that instead of going to an ashram on the Himalaya, I came to Paris. I had a restless desire to know, to learn & work. India was independant & we were face to face with our destinies. Already in Bombay we had formed one of the most dynamic groups of painters & had shown our work all over the country. A book at that stage set fire to our imagination - "Lust for life" by Irving Stone. It was the passionate life of Vincent Van Gogh, a Dutch artist, who lived, worked & died in France. An exhibition of large prints of living French painters organised by the French Consulate in Bombay in 1949 confirmed my decision. I wanted to see the originals, & Paris being a living center of Contemporary Art not only offered this possibility but also an access to all the sources of world art.

The initial plan was to stay in France for two years. I was a government scholar. The Museums, galleries & Cathedrals were open to me. I loved Paris from the first encounter. Though unread & naive, I was confident. I believed I was equipped with the most powerful resources of senses, instincts & intuitions. I visited the exhibitions & museums without a catalogue or a guide, seeking a direct encounter, & personal & unbiased reaction.

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Books & prints were in abundance. André Malraux's Musée Imaginaire had just been published. The French film "La Vie Commence demain" had created an immense enthusiasm. Matisse was showing his collage at the Maison de la Pensée Française. I went from discovery to discovery looking at art's expressions face to face. At the Louvre the later Renaissance paintings left me indifferent, but I greatly admired ^{his} Pieta d'Avignon, Paolo Uccello's "Battle" & the Italian Primitives. There was so much to see from past & present, & there was life also to cope with. At the Musée Jeu de Paume, I stood in front of the self portrait of Van Gogh with tears in my eyes. Happily Cézanne was there ~~to be~~ in the next room. His masterpiece "Card-Players" brought me ^{back} to reason & revealed "construction". The impressionists had captured the light of France, but Gauguin & Douanier Rousseau reminded me of my origins. In the Museum of Modern Art the "Sainte-Face" of Georges ~~Rouault~~ Rouault was a climax of ecstasy. I knew I had to start all over again.

I set down to work. A desire for knowledge & awareness demands courage, passion & involves innumerable risks. I knew even at this stage that my journey was going to be long & hazardous. All the same, I was convinced that every human being had enormous latent resources & they need to be exploited. This is the ~~supreme~~ supreme task in life. The more I faced difficulties in the early years of my stay in Paris, the more I was determined to dominate them. This opposition was the major reason

why I stayed on. It took me six years of persistent + restless efforts to come to substantial results + hold my first individual exhibition in Paris. The Prix de la Critique awarded to me in 1956 made life livable freeing me from material worries. The press covered my exhibition so well that I was famous overnight. My paintings started selling + fetched high prices. It was a good start, but my aims were different. The self portrait of Van Gogh was still haunting me + also the "Sainte-Face" of Georges Rouault. In the darkness of my nights, I hoped ultimately to discover my own face, an echo of my own dormant potentialities.

Many long years have passed since then. My work has evolved with time through a complex EMOTION-THOUGHT process. I haven't much to say about it at present, nor do I have any aesthetic theories to propound. I can however assert that the French climate + art sources have contributed considerably to fortify imagination + expression. I do not think I would have thought + worked the same way in any other part of the world. Passionately interested in nature + its moods, the French landscape became the special theme of my paintings. It provided all the variations of colour + form. Illumined by a strange light, the villages + churches seemed to be ornaments of a beautiful body. For me they became positive elements of construction + space orchestration. COLOUR - the life force, animated form relations, revealed their independent rhythm, bringing me to painting in its purest form.

Coming to a distant land is like a transplantation. A plant needs a certain climate, certain elements to live & thrive on, take roots & grow. So do human beings. They flourish or fade out in a new environment but they do not change their intrinsic characteristics inherent in the seed. Personally I think it is almost impossible to undo an Indian so strong is the impact of his cultural, religious & ethnic background. Also it is very difficult to be a French man, so acute is ~~the~~ ^{the French} perception, individuality, sense of humour & logic. Differences are a positive attraction & there is much to draw from provided a visitor here has discernment & capacity to assimilate.

Artists have special consideration in France. The complexities of art expression & art business are there. It's a highly competitive world but there is no discrimination. And there is a total freedom of expression. Ultimately a work of quality ends up by being recognised & acclaimed. Though an Indian Citizen, I live in a studio apartment of the City of Paris & hold a privileged residents' Card. My wife Janine MONGILLAT is French. We met at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts & got married in 1959. We work in Paris & also in Gorbio, a medieval village in South of France, reminiscent of the fortified towns of Bundelkhand or Rajasthan.

There is a highly interesting group of Indians in Paris, & we meet often. Also many Indian friends visit

us when they pass through here. The physical distance gives us a certain perspective. We keep ourselves informed. We hear a lot of classical Indian music in Paris. Indian textiles & objects are seen every where. Musée Guimet houses a vast collection of Asian Art. Publications & books provide an access to inexhaustible sources of our culture. There is a mosque, an ashram, we read & hear Urdu & Hindi poetry. In fact I discovered Mir, Majaz & Kaifi Azmi only here. Recently we had a really inspired evening of Bhajan & our Minister Maheshwar Dayal played on tabla. We all joined to sing in one single voice. Frankly there is no sentiment of being in exile. We feel the presence of India & rejoice helping others share it with us. Yet we miss India - the earth, the people, the colour, the food, the dark black eyes & our great human family.

At this stage of my life & work, I only wish I could go to India more often. I am much drawn towards our ancient sources & the climate of my own childhood, & only a visit to India permits a direct contact.

And I will greatly desire that an important exhibition of Contemporary Indian ~~&~~ Painting is now organised in Paris. I believe that Indian painting today has come to high standards & has a quiet message. Yet not a single collective exhibition has been presented here so far.

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