

On manifesting erotic metaphors :Jayakumar

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When we are in the process of describing, interpreting and evaluating an art - object , there appears the challenge of finding out the relationship between the art work and the artist's intention, Some of the artists are open enough to leave the internal evidences of his intentions in his own works of art. For others we have to go in search of external evidences for interpretation.

In the case of Jayakumar , who is in the habit of narrating something incessantly in his paintings and drawings with recurring images of woman, bull, horse, peacock, dove, tree etc, he encourages every art-conditioned – eye to dig out layers of several meanings and sub-,meanings. Any viewer of the works of Jayakumar indulging himself in penetrating in to the intentional fabric of the artist is amply rewarded.

Any one can easily trace out the influence of Picasso, the modern master of erotic art in the works of Jayakumar. Just like the nudes of Dega were serving as a spring-board for Picasso, Jayakumar is much inspired by the nude woman, bull, horse and other metaphors of Picasso

In majority of his paintings and drawings Jayakumar is celebrating the nudity of female form. Knowingly or unknowingly Jayakumar has fallen in to the western art trend of giving predominance to female nude over the male in majority of his paintings.

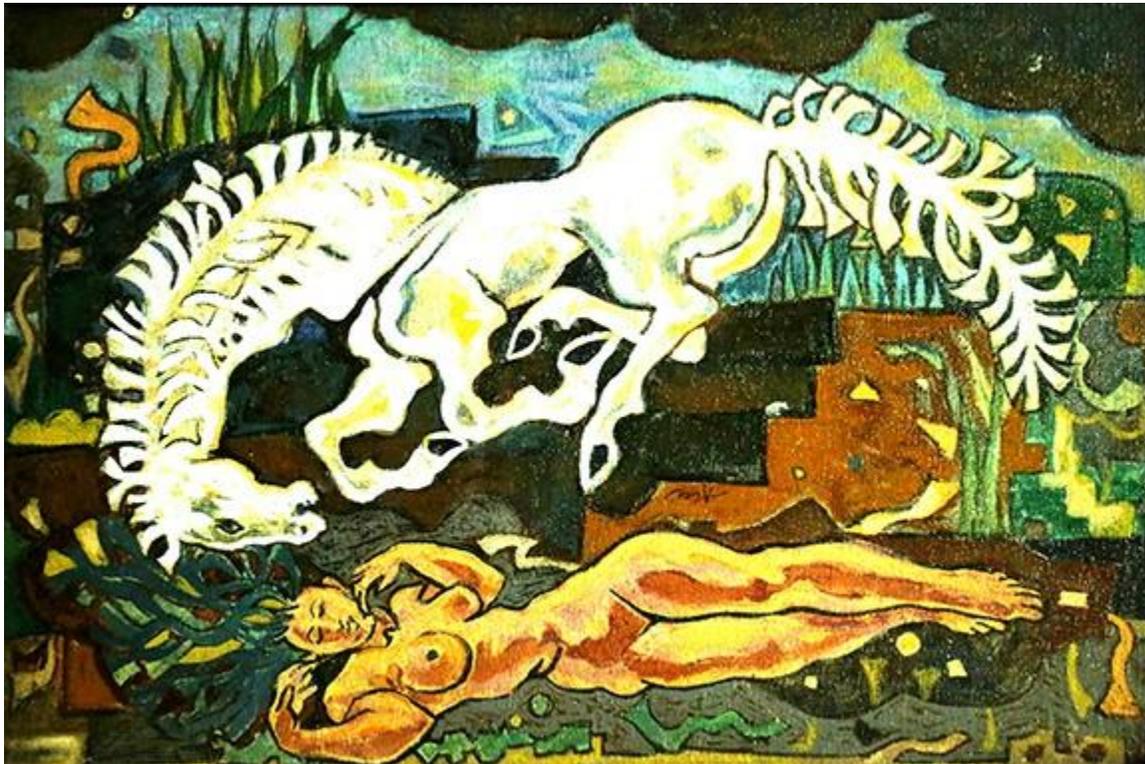
We can classify the works of Jayakumar on female nude broadly in to two major divisions.

1 a woman depicted as a lonely soul

2 a woman depicted along with a beast -- It may be a woman with a bull or a horse, dog or a monkey.

Now let us take up the case of woman as a lonely soul. In such cases the form of woman undergoes a lot of metamorphosis. For example in one of his works a woman is portrayed in the form of a tree. She is being portrayed in several forms of trees, either as a tree overloaded with fruits or a tree decorated with twinkling stars. In another work she is described in the strange form of a banyan tree looking like a woman. Here the artist feels the tree as a symbol of motherliness with the thick foliage as the curling hair and the trunk of the tree as the body of the woman.

I consider this sort of looking at a woman in the form of a tree is an extension of Tamil sensibility wherein the tradition of describing the physiology of a woman as a part of the nature. In the ancient Tamil literature we can find widely, the slender shoulder of the woman is often compared with a sugarcane or a bamboo, eyes are described as ambal or kuvalai flowers, breast as the buds of lotus or palm fruits etc. Because Jayakumar had close relationship with poets like Kannadasan and writers like Jayakanthan his images are more literature oriented.



Though the works of Jayakumar follow the style of western modernism, a touch of Tamil classical idiom is also coming and settling over his works. As we find in the Shilpa Sahstra the artist is trying to accentuate the femininity of a woman by placing a swan or a peacock, fish or a dove that were used widely in the classical sculptures and paintings of Tamilnadu to increase the beauty of a woman. In ancient Tamil poetry women are often called as a peacock or a parrot, dove or a pearl.

But at the same time , we should not fail to observe that the body language of the nude female forms of his paintings are not fully dictated by the Tamil sensibility. The women forms finding place in his paintings and drawings are all nudes. The stark nakedness of the human forms were not permitted to take place in the traditional sculptures and paintings of Tamilnadu.

Though the erotic works of art find place in various temple carts, temple pillars and the steps of the tanks , the stark naked forms are not freely circulated without embarrassment. If we take the Jain temple of Tirupparutikunram in Kancheepuram district the teertankaras in nude forms are permitted. But you cannot find a single nude human form in the paintings of the Jain temple. So the deliberate treatment of nudity is not generally permitted in the paintings and sculptures of Tamil society. If we take the Shilpa Shastras like Manasaram, they permit nudity only in two cases of Hindu mythology ---one in the case of Bhikshadana murty , siva in the form of a beggar and the Mohini avatar of Vishnu. In all other places the suggestion of garments are always insisted in all adult human forms .

The treatment of nude forms have become a part of art expression only on the introduction of British art education in India. Jayakumar being a student of Madras college of fine arts and subsequently went for an advance training in art for an year in Surrey , UK, with British Council scholarship, he is resorting to a guiltless expression of nudes in his works. But at the same time Jayakumar's works are dictated by the Indian classical expression and thereby giving way to a confluence of western and Indian styles in his works. So in majority of the paintings and drawings of Jayakumar an aesthetics of ambivalence and a sort of hybridism is in operation.

Now let us take his series of works on the bull and the woman as well as the horse and the woman. We can broadly classify these works in to three types.

1 A woman is being attacked either by a bull or a horse. In most of these paintings a woman is often depicted as a victim fallen on the floor while the bull as a symbol of power and ferocity is attacking her with relentless violence.

2 A woman, after taking full control of the beast, is alighted either on a bull or a horse and passionately kissing the beast.

3 a woman is depicted along with a horse and a bull in the same canvas.

In all these series of art works my area of focus is the play of power in man -- woman relationships. One should not fail to note the pre-structured value judgments about the place of women in Indian society in his works. In his first type of paintings the play of gender bias is to be noted. The binary opposition of Woman = weakness x man = strength (bull) is powerfully portrayed in his first set of paintings. In many of his works the bull is vehemently attacking the woman on her chest ; the horse is throwing the woman on the floor and standing above her.

On the other side , many of his paintings celebrate the victory of woman over the man. In some of his paintings winning the man with love the woman is sitting above a bull or an horse with romantically flowing hair. The horse fully accepting her dominance is taking off in the sky with open wings.

Jayakumar , as an artist successfully handles many sensitive visual metaphors in his paintings and drawings and thereby facilitate the capturing of our phenomenological experience of the world in a unique way. He creates a private mythology of his own by which he is able connect together objects, events and actions that appear to be empirically disparate and unconnected and are part of cultural expression