

Neo-Tantrism in painting

WHEN this writer met N. Raghavan, the tall young man with bushy beard and abundant hair on skull, he was busy creating a colour-space that reflected his state of mind with strong Tantric overtones. His work was trying sincerely to enable the viewer to re-experience the emotions that made him create his painting. There was an interplay of instinct and reason, conscious and sub-conscious mind in his canvases. The inexpressive regions of heart, palpable treasures of dream, songs and soliloquies were playing a dominating role in constituting his art.

Modern Indian artist is often found fault with for his rootlessness, alienation, westernisation, imitation and sterility. But Raghavan with true artistic bones in his body, comes out successfully without giving room for any of these charges.

He has chosen neo-Tantrism as the subject matter of his paintings. The symbolic language of Tantra, the ancient esoteric Indian cult gains more power and vitality when it is being used with the serene water colours of Raghavan. In his painting 'Shatkona Siddhi,' a cryptic diagram with six angles believed to control the cosmic forces in Tantrism, is being further enlarged with rich imagination of Raghavan to suggest two human figures with masculine and feminine characters in sexual union. Through his effective control over his water-colour medium, he achieves a smooth flowing light to spread evenly in his canvas.

But for his borrowings of the symbols of Tantrism, he does not borrow anything from any Indian school of art, even from that of the recent past. The idiom of the ancient paintings of India, whether it is Ajanta or Sthanavasal, is a pattern of a particular community effort of a particular period of time. Any modern artist trying to follow it blindly will fall into the fallacy of placing himself in a dead pattern. But today, with art becoming a vehicle for personal expressive survival, modern artists do their paintings for personal reasons, perhaps in the spirit or quest of inner-definition. Since Raghavan is quite aware of this, he tries to create his own idiom

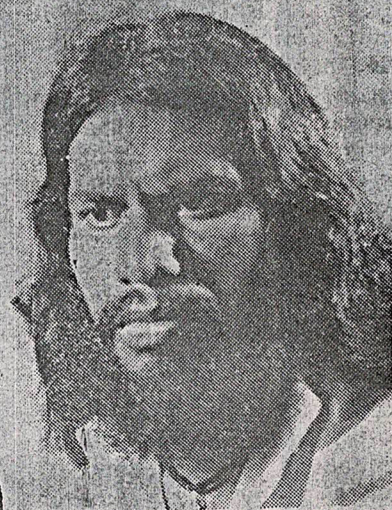
of painting. To actualise this he goes in search of the inner springs of his creative self.

According to Raghavan, before doing a painting he purges his mind of all disturbing elements and concentrates on the subject matter. During his meditative moments his mind leaves the world of forms and soars high in the world of the formless. During the fusion of his mind with the world of formless, he draws spontaneously the desired form, colour, design and tone of his paintings. This intuitive contemplation is often referred to by the ancient thinkers

like Buddhaghosha, as the most essential element in constituting a first rank work of art.

His interest in conveying an ideological meditative message in his works of art is very much Indian in essence. His preference of infinite over finite, immortal over mortal, spiritual over ethical, emotional over intellectual is an evidence to prove that his canvas still remains untainted by western values.

INDRAN



A painting by Raghavan