

TANTRA HIS IDIOM

K. M. Gopal lives on the breezy golden beach of Cholamandal — the artists' village located near Madras city — and is now busy filling his canvas with allusions and allegories of various practices of the Tantric cult.

It is very quiet inside his cottage, the Bay of Bengal outside this serene simple paradise of painters. In the art gallery of Cholamandal, critics and guests — both foreign and Indian — exchange their views on art in whispers. PTC buses glide along the highway with an air of boredom and matter-of-factness while Gopal works in his studio to perfect his motives in terms of thin washes of colour.

K. M. Gopal, the 50-year-old painter, with his gold earrings, big moustache, dark, bare body and small tuft is a kind of person one rarely comes across. With a deep gaze of his bright burning eyes, he describes the various stages of his paintings and his constant experiments with colour.

While he was practising yoga at Kolli hills at Salem in 1971, he found out the idiom of his paintings — Tantra. The closely guarded secrets of tantra, the esoteric school of Hinduism that advocates salvation through sex started appearing in his canvas suggestively. He felt it was a subject of sufficient dignity to enable him to demonstrate all his skills.

His paintings started talking a symbolic language that allows full play to the fantasy and feeling for poetry. New symbolic forms emerged to express his new spiritual belief. His complex allegories have links with Hindu mythology and at the same time contain irrational images which baffle interpretation. When in 1978 he decided to settle down at Cholamandal, the artists' village founded by K. C. S. Pannikar, Indian spirituality in its broadest senses became the inexhaustible source and energy for his paintings.

He took up the study of 32 types of Ganeshwar very intensely. His 'Artha Ganeshwari' that was purchased by National Gallery of Modern Art is one of the fruits of his study on Ganesha.

Though his paintings can be classified in various schools of modern art ranging from abstract expressionism to the most extravagant form of surrealism, they maintain a classical character that is so Indian and so dear to him.

Our Indian character always prevents us from considering art as a simple game, empty of content. On the contrary, Indian painters are a prey to the fault of giving over-importance to subjects that can ultimately damage art itself; but that can become a great force also. Gopal's paintings bear witness to

this fact. Gopal is very assertive when he says that art without a subject is of an anti-Indian essence.

But we can as well say that the role of a subject in art is purely the business of the artist. His concern with subject alone does not constitute art.

If we take the work of Gopal, 'The Prana Aparna', whether the snake in the painting represents kundalini power or not or the male and female faces denote two types of breathings, is of less interest to us than a crossword puzzle. According to critics of modern art, what

is obvious enough in his paintings, particularly in his 'Prana Aparna'. Unusual surf-like colour combinations in his paintings speak directly to the viewers. His canvas is filled with colours that have certain internal emotional properties and his unique techniques of paintings are made to express internal emotional messages. The various Mantras (mystic syllables) and Yantras (mystic diagrams) form an important part of his paintings. Though it is not his intention to bring out "op" art effects in his paintings, we can say to certain extent that the luminous quality of his canvas belongs to 'op' art.

By Indran

is important is what he did with all his material and medium.

American artist Stuart Davis says, "Art knocks you out on a physical level without showing you its passport."

An artist must be a conscious master of the medium in which he works. By means of control over his medium, he can translate the images of his mind into external visual realities.

Gopal's awareness of this fact is

The Bengal school of art had some influence on K. M. Gopal in his early paintings. This we can attribute to his master, Devi Prasad Rai Choudri, the then principal of Madras College of Arts, where Gopal studied painting. Now he is entirely free of all these influences and has found his own style of painting.

In these days when artists grab each other's styles, subjects and mannerisms before the paint is wet, K. M. Gopal is fiercely independent but not eccentric. He intensely offers a specific objective individual experience that is original and entirely Indian in its essence.



K. M. Gopal's "Prana Aparna"