

Calligraphic Forms in Contemporary Indian Paintings

Dr. Suresh Chandra Jangid

Assistant Director, Rajasthan Council of School Education, Jaipur

Abstract

A painting gets its body with the help of different forms. A fragment of beautiful text can be an art form. This is the basic idea behind this paper. Besides, searching and evaluating the possibilities of visual functions of the script is the core subject of the text.

Introduction

Forms in a painting have a great significance, whether it bears a conventional appearance or the abstract one. With a movement of the point, form starts taking shape. These forms can be representational pictures, illustrations and even letters or characters.

According to encyclopedia Britannica, 'Calligraphy' is an art of writing. The term is derived from the Greek word for 'good' or 'beautiful' writing or 'drawing' and refers to what masters called the art of fair writing. It implies a sure knowledge of the correct form of letters that is the conventional signs by which language can be communicated and the skill to inscribe them with such ordering of the various parts and harmony of proportions that the cultivated eye will recognize the compositions as a work of art.



Background

Now a day, the world is shrinking in a unit as an outcome of globalization. All spheres of our life, especially art and literature facing the transitional phase. As far as the matter of contemporary painting in India is concerned, it has assimilated some of the western import. The various isms or styles and their influence on Indian painting are also an example of this import. Besides, the Indian culture has refined and processed these imports in contemporary paintings in many ways.

Use of calligraphic forms in paintings is a new face of Indian art. Although, when we retrospect on the ancient tradition, we find a number of instances where text has been used with the painted images, but here the text seems to be accompanying the form not to be a part of the



entire picture. Whereas the contemporary process of incorporating the text finds its origin in western art movements like letterism and typewriter art.

Letterism is a cultural school, similar to Romanticism and Surrealism, seeking to bring about an evolution of universal values through its own characteristic creations. It was started by a young poet in Paris a refugee from Romania named 'Isidore Isou' in 1945. He had an idea for refreshing poetry and art after the terror of world war-II and after centuries of increasing boredom in literature, his idea was to renew painting and poetry by using letters for their creations. He invented many artists and poets and they created a number of art works, attacking the tedious post war culture with painting made of letters and poems made of letter sounds. The important thing was not to tell the same stories over again, but to create beautiful and exciting new works. The boundaries segregating all arts were broken down and all sorts of subjects such as economics and science were given a letterist twist. It continued even today and has embraced artists in Europe and America, sometimes spawning spin-off movements.

Like the letterist movement, there was another art movement known as typewriter art, which started in 1867, and became a popular art medium during 1950's and 1970's. There are many wonderful examples of typewriter art found in the local publications.

Besides these art movements of Europe and America, some other countries also influenced Indian contemporary art trends. Egypt, China, Japan, Russia and Arab countries have important place in this list.



The very first examples of the calligraphic forms developed as Egyptian hieroglyphics, which was in practice around 3,000 B.C. In the initial form, the written word did not consist of 'text', they consisted only pictorial symbols, which represented ideas and objects. Egyptian hieroglyphics were a combination of picture writing and some phonetic symbols. Other writing systems became phonetic early, where a symbol stopped being a picture and only represented sound but they have widely different designs as in the Arabic and Hebrew scripts. In East Asia, calligraphy by long and existing tradition is considered as a major art form, like painting. In these countries, the most widely practiced writing styles favoured spontaneity and the brush was supposed to act like a seismograph in recording the movements of arm, wrist and hand.

The fundamental inspiration of Chinese calligraphy, as of all arts in China, is nature. In regular script each stroke, even each dot, suggest the form of a natural object, as every twig of a living tree is alive, so every tiny stroke of a piece of fine calligraphy has the energy of living thing. On the other hand, Japanese calligraphy is an abstract study of the beauty and expressiveness of pure line. It involves an aesthetic sensibility. Calligraphy is considered as the essence of minimalism, using a few lines of black ink on a white paper, to express the most vital and profound ideas.

In Russia, there is a well known literature cum art heritage, named ‘Lubok’. This is the compilation of the Russian folk drawings and prints depicting moral teachings. These folk prints mirrored the aesthetic taste of the people, their ideas of good and evil, their moral and ethical standards. The beauty of their ornamentation and the naïve charm and frankness of their images exceptionally interesting, are the wall sheets with the engraved prayers, decorated with exquisite head piece and the text pictures with the moral messages.



Indian Context

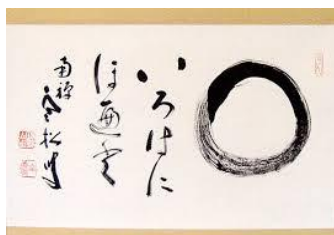
Like other countries, no such art movements took place in India related to calligraphy but a number of artists have been using calligraphic forms in their paintings. The old manuscripts and inscriptions are considered as a source of inspiration for them with the foreign art exhibitions, the term ‘pure painting’ and



‘painting without a subject matter’ had entered in the vocabulary of artists and critics alike bemusedly tried to fathom their meaning.

Though the experiments with the calligraphy are very vast but we can codify these experiments under certain points, which are as follows:-

1. Calligraphy as an art form.
2. Calligraphy as a space divider.
3. Calligraphy as tactile quality.
4. Calligraphy as a tool for narration.



A number of artists have used calligraphy as an art form. For instance, in Akhilesh’s paintings, we can find many letters like submerging in a blue sea canvas. This seems closer to a visual graffiti that cannot be read but resembles to the scripture. Beside



Akhilesh, R.N. Tagore, Jyoti Bhatt, K.C.S. Panikar, Chitrovanu Mazumdar and Baiju Parthan have also used calligraphy as an art form.

The another quality of letters, dividing the space can be seen in art works of Shanti Dave, Sujata Bajaj, Anupam Sud, Rameshwar Singh. Besides the tactile quality or the scripture is being used by Shanti Dave and Rameshwar Singh. In the works of these two artists, we can see the use of embossed and inlayed text, which create an interesting texture to the surface.



The natural quality of the letter is to narrate. Many artists including S.H. Raza, Sujata Bajaj and Atul Dodia have been using this quality of the scripture, earlier M.F. Hussain and Bhupen Khakker had also used narrative letters in their paintings. On the other hand, Jitish Kallat has been doing a different kind of experiment with the text. He uses calligraphic text to write down the title of his painting on the canvas itself. Sujata Bajaj and S.H.Raza are fascinated by the positive energy of the holy script, and they have incorporated it in their works.

Conclusion

The works today reflect the time we are passing through, has also the impact of various art traditions. It has nourished our visual perceptions. We can feel our rich tradition and at the same time highly modern pop art content as an element of street art form. The Indian aesthetics prefers to simplifications than the complex images of the western perspectives. We can see the synthesis of entirely different philosophies in contemporary Indian art. These most amazing trends are the traditionalistic and modernistic at the same time, which emerged in Indian art horizon during last fifty years and enriched the Indian art.

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